Special Interest Group/Information Needs, Seeking and Use (SIG/USE) convened at the 2015 ASIS&T Annual Meeting to explore the links between theory and practice in information behavior. In his keynote address, Ross Todd urged the audience to go beyond models and aim for synthesis and meta-analysis, focusing on the user. Lightning talks addressed a social cognitive theory analysis of a program for disadvantaged youth; adults with limited literacy and health information; mobile information workers; forming a community of practice; and information sharing practices among online communities. A key takeaway was that research should actively involve communities and their members rather than simply being about them. Safiya Noble’s keynote highlighted hidden biases in automated search engine returns with encouragement to design algorithms enabling users to opt in or out of filtered returns. Attendees explored the topics raised further during a mixer chat and table talks. The symposium ended with presentations for the best paper, poster and research proposal and awards for student and international conference travel.

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First Keynote Address

Ross Todd is an associate professor in the School of Communication and Information, Department of Library & Information Science at Rutgers University. Drawing on his body of work on school libraries, Dr. Todd’s talk, “Transforming Research to Practice: A Holistic User-Centered Framework,” highlighted his insights into the interconnections between research and practice. Urging researchers to listen to and work with practitioners, he encouraged attendees to move beyond the generation of multitudes of mid-level models into methods of synthesis and meta-analysis.

Lightning Talks

The next portion of the symposium featured the five lightning talks listed below. The talks explored connections among theory building, research and practice as they relate to information needs, seeking and use. This area included the examination of multidirectional connections between theory and research as well as societal and practice implications of information science research. The talks presented research and its implications for practice on a wide range of topics from health to hobbies and with a wide range of participants, from disadvantaged youth to vulnerable adults.

“Following the Thread of Social Cognitive Theory Through the Development, Implementation and Outcomes of the HackHealth After-School Program for Disadvantaged Youth.” Beth St. Jean, Mega Subramaniam, Natalie Greene Taylor, Christie Kodama, University of Maryland, and Dana Casciotti, National Library of Medicine

“Methodological Challenges Related to Working with Vulnerable Participants: Adults with Low Literacy and Health Information Behavior.” Miraida Morales, Rutgers University


“Knitting Together an Online, Hobby-Based Community of Practice.” Nicole Cooke, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign


Denise Agosto, Drexel University, served as discussant for the lightning talks. She highlighted commonalities across the presentations and the strengths of the various approaches to research, urging information behavior researchers to do research with communities rather than imposing research on communities.

Following Agosto’s discussion, SIG/USE symposium co-chair Devon Greyson introduced the mixer chat, a free-form discussion that allowed symposium participants a chance to discuss issues brought up in Dr. Todd’s keynote and the lightning talks.

Second Keynote Address

Safiya Noble, assistant professor in the Department of Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, delivered the second keynote address. Her talk, “Power, Privilege and the Imperative to Act,” provided a thought-provoking look into search from racist and sexist automated search suggestions to the influence of top search results on outcomes from the personal to the political. Dr. Noble used examples from her work to demonstrate that the information retrieval algorithms of for-profit search engines such as Google are in actuality advertising algorithms. Urging attendees to be concerned that library and information expertise was being bypassed as the public’s information seeking moves increasingly into biased commercial information spaces, Dr. Noble presented intriguing ideas regarding possible future search tools that might require users to opt in to prejudice rather than centering oppressive online content.

Table Talks

Following Dr. Noble’s keynote, there was a facilitated discussion about research and practice. Five senior scholars in the field led the table talks: Gary Burnett and Heidi Julien, University at Buffalo; Heather O’Brien, University of British Columbia; Ross Todd, Rutgers; and Barbara Wildemuth, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The facilitators discussed their own experiences with the challenges and benefits of working
in both research and practice within the field of information behavior. A lively discussion followed.

2014 SIG/USE Research and Travel Awards

Awards committee co-chairs Heather O’Brien and Wade Bishop, University of Kentucky, presented this year’s winning submissions at the symposium.

- The Best Information Behavior Paper Award: “Social Search Behavior in a Social Q&A Service: Goals, Strategies and Outcomes” by Grace YoungJoo Jeon and Soo Young Rich, University of Michigan
- The Best Information Behavior Poster Award: “Health Information Triangulation: A Complex and Agentic Practice Among Young Parents” by Devon Greyson, University of British Columbia
- The Elfreda A. Chatman Research Proposal Award: Debbie Rabina and Emily Drabinski, Pratt Institute, for their project titled, “A Blueprint for Information Intervention for Incarcerated People”

- The Student Travel Award was given to three recipients: Leslie Thomson, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Sarah Chizari, University of South Carolina; and Danielle Pollock, University of Tennessee.
- The Interdisciplinary Conference Travel Award: Jenna Hartel, University of Toronto, to support her attendance at the 4th International Visual Methods Conference (IVM), University of Brighton in England

The presentation of results from the 2014 Elfreda A. Chatman Research Proposal Award was deferred to the 2016 meeting.

More information about the SIG/USE awards is located at http://siguse.wordpress.com/awards/.

Symposium Conclusion

Incoming SIG/USE chair Gary Burnett offered closing remarks for the 2015 SIG/USE Symposium, highlighting common themes discussed in the keynotes, lightning talks and discussions.