

ISI Conversations

Newsletter of the **Asilomar Design Conversation Community**,
an affiliate of the **International Systems Institute**.

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ISI MISSION STATEMENT

The International Systems Institute is a non-profit, public benefit, scientific and educational agency. Organized as a community of scholars and practitioners and a network of institutions, ISI aims to apply systems and design thinking: [1] to create models and methods for the design of educational and other human activity systems, [2] to develop resources for systems and design learning, and [3] to design models and methods for social and societal systems.

Greetings to our Community,

After a busy year of reorganization and refocus, now is the time we begin forming our teams for this year. This is an exciting activity and I encourage everyone to find an area of interest, select a team and join us at Asilomar this fall. This is truly a time when you are needed by the community and will have many opportunities to use your talents in support of ISI. I encourage everyone to invite a colleague or friend to join us this year. If we are to be a vibrant community, we need new ideas and new faces in our community. Share with someone the value and benefits you receive from our annual conversation and help them become a member of our community. If you have not attended our conversation recently, check the dates and see if you can join us this year. While looking forward to new faces, there are some members we have not seen recently and would love to embrace this year. Each of you has unique and wonderful ideas to share. We need this diversity of ideas and perspectives if we are to create a true conversation mosaic. Have a wonderful spring and summer then join us in the fall!

In service,

Peggy B. Gill,
Asilomar Conference Coordinator

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AN INVITATION TO JOIN US

Many of you are past participants in one of our annual Conversations held at the Asilomar Conference Grounds in November. One of several conversation communities sponsored by the International Systems Institute (ISI), the Asilomar Conversation provides participants with a wonderful opportunity to engage in a conceptually rich, thought provoking learning experience. This year we hope to attract many past participants as well as new ones in order to maintain our momentum and continue to build new connections with scholars and practitioners of systems thinking from a variety of fields of inquiry. Here are some of the Conversation's features:

- Held in a comfortable Pacific Coast conference grounds with a setting guaranteed to induce both relaxation and an appreciation of one of Nature's most beautiful places. The sunsets are spectacular and soothing.
- Participants select a conversation topic of interest and spend the 5 days engaged in an intensive and satisfying conversation aimed at developing new meanings and a deeper understanding of the topic (see another section for the topics offered for the November event).
- The conversation process is designed to permit maximum participation by group members. Deep listening, openness to others' ideas, and an unfailing generosity for the contributions of group members nearly always lead to new insights for participants. Group size tends to average 5-7 people.
- The conversation mode of inquiry is in direct contrast to the more conventional professional conference in which attendees spend their days listening to prepared papers.

You are cordially invited to our November Conversation and we look forward to greeting old and new friends. If you wish further information about the Conversation program, please direct your inquiries to one of the following:

Gordon Rowland – rowland@ithaca.edu
 Doug Walton – doug@networkeddemocracy.com
 Lynn Jenks – cljenks@sbcglobal.net

A GUIDE TO THE YEAR 'ROUND PROCESS by Bela H. Banathy and Sue McCormick

PHASE ONE: PROGRAM ANNOUNCEMENT AND TEAM IDENTIFICATION/SELECTION

Mid- to late March: Research Team Topics are announced in the newsletter/ bulletin. Participants respond using the attached registration form. This form serves two purposes: (1) It gives the Conference Planning Team information related to expressed interest in research topics so teams can begin to coalesce; and (2) It provides critical information related to reserving a block of rooms at the Asilomar Conference Center.

Late March to Mid- April: The Conversation Planning Team, using input from conference registrants and others expressing interest, begins to clarify research teams and connect registrants with team coordinators.

April: Team Coordinators send to all interested members an elaboration of the topic/theme that includes a brief history of the team's work from previous conversations year' round inquiry, as well as a list of recommended readings. This list will include earlier topic-relevant summary reports.

PHASE TWO: PREPARATION

The preparation phase of the research conversation serves a critically important purpose. Preparation enables participants to explore topic-relevant knowledge bases, and in so doing, come to the Conversation with a rich set of core ideas. Preparation also gives team members a chance to interact with one another, sharing background experiences and current systems design research interests. This early interaction is usually electronically mediated.

From Conversation experiences of the past 20 some years, we have learned that the success of the program greatly depends upon the team's generation of a substantive knowledge base prior to being together for the week. We are also learning that team interaction during the preparation phase has some positive effects on the quality of the conversation during the week we are together at the conference.

We strongly urge participants new to the design conversation process to identify a team early in the year, and begin the preparation phase with that team. If during the preparation phase, research interests change, it is always possible to change teams, assuming the team of interest is open to new members.

April-September: Participants (1) Explore the knowledge base of the research topic; (2) Prepare a "think paper" that (a) presents a brief personal introduction, (b) specifies personal interest in and previous work on the topic, (c) summarizes knowledge base findings, (d) states core ideas about the topic, and (e) states expectations for the learning and work of the team; (3) Mail copies of the input "think paper" to all members of their research team.

Mid September -Mid October: Team coordinators develop a preliminary, proposed agenda of their team's "theme," based on a synthesis of the input papers and mail it to the members of the team. Members of the team continue to explore current knowledge sources and generate ideas that they will bring to the group work during the conversation week.

PHASE THREE: THE CONVERSATION

During the first sessions of the Conversation, teams review their agenda and develop triggering questions that guide the conversation. The teams are encouraged to use generative and strategic dialogue methods. Periodically throughout the week, research teams report on their progress, and those interested in inter-team learning and dialogue may pursue that experience in the evenings. Another option for inter-team learning emerged at our conference in the late nineties, and this is a daily Round Table conversation, held before breakfast at an announced location.

In the final team sessions of the week, each team decides whether members wish to continue to work on the theme, modify the topic or select a new area of focus. On the final evening of the conference, participants present their work and findings to the large group. They also announce whether or not the team plans to continue their research into another Year 'Round Conversation Cycle. On the final morning of the conference, participants engage in a preliminary design and planning session for the following year's conference and for the projects that may involve inter-team collaboration. Participants are asked during this last session to formulate their "valuations" of the Conversation experience.

PHASE FOUR: FOLLOW-UP

Mid November - Early March: Teams develop (1) A Summary report of their learning and substantive findings, (2) A summary description of program recommendations for the Asilomar Conversation for the upcoming year, and (3) A final formative evaluation of the overall conversation experience.

Mid January - Mid March: Individuals develop and submit scholarly papers based on their work with the topic. The papers will be published as a compendium of proceedings and selected papers will be included in special issues of international systems journals.

Mid March on: We initiate the beginning phase of the Asilomar Year 'Round Conversation cycle for the upcoming year.

The newsletter staff invites readers to submit pieces related to systems design, design learning, ISI or ACC. We welcome reports, stories, quotes, passages or poems FOR OUR INSPIRATION as well as your thoughts, theories or POINT OF VIEW. Illustrations, pictures, etc. are encouraged, too. We prefer short pieces, so that we can present an interesting variety. Keep in mind that we want to give preference to contributions that are reader-authored to emphasize the creative/generative thought process of our readers. We also invite readers to submit short inspirational citations. Yours in Service, Sue and Ted

RESEARCH TEAMS FOR 2004
by Team Leaders

(For photos of our 2003 Conversation, see
http://www.networkeddemocracy.com/photogallery/ACC2003/acc_2003_photo_gallery.htm)

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RESEARCH TEAM A & B: ISI DESIGN TEAM
Doug Walton (doug@networkeddemocracy.com)

These topics focuses on taking a fresh look at what ISI ought to be. The intention is to engage as much of the community as possible. This effort is divided into two subsections:

- Kernel Design, which deals with administrative services for ISI
- The Fire & Flame, which deals with deals with ISI strategic direction, mission, and the soul of what we are doing.

These are described below.

RESEARCH TEAM A: Ongoing ISI Design: Kernel Services Structure

During the 2003 Asilomar Conversation Conference, a systems model was outlined for administrative services needed by ISI. This model (called the Kernel Services) was based on an organizing principle of creating many thin interlocking roles that would enable a number of volunteers to keep the system going without placing excessive burden on any one person. During the 2004 conversation cycle, the Kernel Services team seeks to expand and deepen the concept by (a) piloting the roles, (b) analyzing the results of the pilots, (c) developing a master calendar to drive time-triggered activities, and (d) deepening an understanding of the associated technology (e.g., websites and communications tools).

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RESEARCH TEAM B: The Fire & Flame of ISI (updated 4/15/04)
Christine Wailand Harrison cwailand@cybertrails.com
Judith Bach elkephant@earthlink.com

This research group, as the Design Team, will formulate ideas around the evolution of ISI. There is a strong sense that the time has come for us to renew the core of ACC.

The format of our inquiry is a Future Search conference during ACC '04. By reflecting on where we have been, we may be able to take responsibility of where we would like to go.

Following is a draft of our schedule

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|--------------------------------|--|
| Day 1 (Sunday 11/14) Afternoon | * Focus on the Past (coord.w/Historian) |
| | * Focus on Present, External Trends |
| Day 2 (Monday) | * Continue – Trends |
| | * Focus on Present, Owning our Actions |
| | * Ideal Future Scenarios |
| Day 3 (Tuesday) | * Identify Common Ground |
| | * Continued – Confirm Common Ground |
| | * Action Planning |
| Day 4 (Wednesday) | * Action Planning (coord. w/Kernel Design) |
| | * Preparation for Presentation |
| Thursday/Friday | * Group presentations |
| | * Follow up actions |

Suggested reading: Any of Bela H. Banathy's works on the Design Process and *Future Search, An Action Guide to Finding Common Ground in Organizations & Communities* (Weisbord & Janoff)

As the initiation of the beginning phase of the Asilomar Conversation cycle we ask participants for an input

paper. This paper could describe your experiences at previous ACC conferences related to Bela’s concept of Systems Service and/or any of the ways that you have implemented what you have gained from these conversations into your own community or workplace. If you are new to the Asilomar Conversation Community, please write about what you envision in this context. ISI’s mission, core values, a proposed manifesto, stewardship definitions, the Year- round Process and other related foundational work for ACC is available.

For those not familiar with the Future Search format, it is a value-based, action-oriented process to find common ground for a shared vision and take responsibility for our future. We look for creativity, to expand possibilities and to enable constructive action. We propose to do all this to help us grow into the space that Bela has opened up for us.

We look forward to engage as many participants as possible. Please feel free to contact the coordinators with any questions, concerns or suggestions.

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RESEARCH TEAM C: The Thread of ISI
Coordinator: Diana Ryan; dianafryan@msn.com

(This conversation is proposed to complement the work of the Kernel services and the Fire and the Flame.)

As everyone on the mailing list is aware, Diana Ryan, as ISI Historian, is gathering documents and artifacts of ISI history. These are threads that bind ISI as an organization and a culture. The data will be of value to the re-design process and, therefore, if you are interested in contributing to the creation of our story, please join Diana in the tedious and the sublime. The intention is to put the survey outcome into useable and interesting form (minimally, documents could be indexed, for example and stories simply listed) and to weave the thread of the story around the Kernel, Fire and Flame that are the heart of the ISI fabric.

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RESEARCH TEAM D: Evolutionary Development -Sponsored by Syntony Quest (updated 4/23/04)
Alexander Laszlo, Ph.D., Kathia C. Laszlo, Ph.D.<alexander@syntonyquest.org>

We'd like to announce the rekindling of our group, originally founded in 1993 as an offspring of the Design Culture research team. Over the years, our team has gone from being Group D - The Design Culture team, to D-Gang, to the ELC team (Evolutionary Learning Community), to the HAC/ELC team (Healthy & Authentic Community and ELC), to a time when we explored Agoras as a form of ELC, to what we would like to propose now: the Evolutionary Development team. We see Evolutionary Development as the process focus for which ELC is but one type of vehicle (and where the Agora is but one type of ELC). Inquiry in the area of Evolutionary Development involves revision of development notions and strategies from a systemic and evolutionary perspective in order to integrate the often isolated areas of human, economic, social, and sustainable development.

Doing more with less, promoting living simply and meaningfully, and creating a sustainable economy where present and future human needs can be met without compromising the natural environment are some of the concrete objectives of Evolutionary Development. Evolutionary Learning Communities, as learning environments where people can learn together about the interconnected nature of our world, the ecological impact of our individual and collective choices, and the joy of finding a meaningful way to contribute to the emergence of sustainable and evolutionary futures, are the social units where Evolutionary Development can be set in motion for the ongoing self-organization of human societies in syntony with the planetary life support systems upon which they depend.

This research team will be explicitly related to the action-research conducted by our organization, Syntony Quest. We will do our best to announce and promote the conversation event as a project of Syntony Quest, and by doing so, we hope to bring people to ISI/ACC events who are either theoreticians or practitioners in areas closely related to evolutionary development. Anyone who has any interest in any of the following types of topics is very welcome to join our team at Asilomar:

- Human, social, and natural capital
- Self-directed sustainable development
- Community empowerment and participatory/anticipatory democracy
- Socio-ecological competence and the evolution of consciousness
- Design of ELCs as evolutionary guidance systems
- Evolutionary Systems Design as praxis
- Syntony as an organizing force in societal evolution

We intend our team to represent an opportunity to do much more than simply share ideas. It will also explicitly cultivate relationship. The emphasis on pattern and process in understanding both the 'what' and the 'why' of the systems we are, makes ISI events rich and rewarding.

Of course, if there is anything we can help clarify for you with respect to any of the above, please do get in touch with us.

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RESEARCH TEAM E: It's a Small World Ideabook Team: "Into the Rabbit Hole" Board Game Development Coordinator: Yoshi Horiuchi (KHB15476@nifty.ne.jp)

At the 2003 Asilomar, the SWI (Its a Small World Idea Book Team) devoted its time for developing a more advanced, college-level educational board game. In 2004, the SWI team will return to the continuing development of the "Into the Rabbit Hole" Board Game that we started development at the 2002 Asilomar. What the Game need is to incorporate more learning lessons on systems approach and the global ecology. However, the SWI does not wish to produce "good medicine that tastes bad," This balancing of the fun aspects and educational aspect of the game will continue to be our main task.

Trigger Questions:

1. What the game goal should be? It is great and very important that we are having fun in developing and playing this game. We hope to make it as a real, marketable game either this year or the next year, while we have a good going.
- 2 How can we make it educational, while maintaining its fun element?
- 3 What systems/ecological points to incorporate into the game? In what way?
4. As we can agree that this is a fun game, what is a good strategy to make it as a real product?

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RESEARCH TEAM F: Co-operated Roundtables for Schools, Workplaces, and Other Organizations or Communities (updated April '04) Sue Gabriele (sgabriele@gemslearning.com), Ted Ferguson (tedferguson@gemslearning.com), Diana Ryan (dianafryan@msn.com)

The Roundtable Research team met for the first time as an ACC Research Team at Asilomar in 2001. Building on Sue's dissertation research, the team was to create a rich picture of opportunities for future Roundtable research and development. We wanted a flexible design/master plan to help us [1] to continue to locate opportunities for Roundtables; [2] to create Roundtable guides, workbooks, and/or starter kits for interested and potential users; [3] to create promotional pieces for the buyer; and [4] to continue developing the "Roundtable Program."

Our progress in 2001-2003: We continued offering morning Roundtables in ISI/ACC and ISSS, as feasible. We introduced Roundtables in 8 teachers classrooms in four different schools, and continued working weekly or monthly with 4 teachers. We convene a co-operated Roundtable weekly book study at a local book store. We demonstrated the Roundtable in an after school program in Oakland, which was continued by the participants. This year, with the help of Diana Ryan, the Roundtable Research team expanded to include the introduction of Roundtables in university courses--in a course offered at a corporation and in a graduate education course.

Our goals in 2004: With regard to ISI and ACC, we see three possible developments for our "Roundtable" work during the year and at the November ACC conversation. First, we are prepared to continue the morning Roundtable, open to all attending the conference--both those interested in becoming Roundtable facilitators,

continuing their current Roundtables, or helping with the Roundtable Program and those who simply want a morning opportunity to connect and reflect in this way. Second, we will offer a formal Roundtable Research Team if there are a number of people interested in working more at depth with the Roundtable theory and practice during this conversation. A third possibility is to assist in bringing back the whole community evening team report, adding value to it with emancipatory features of the Roundtable. We anticipate two benefits in this possibility: [1] whole group connection with ongoing team and individual progress reports, and [2] the opportunity for later risers to experience the Roundtable benefits. Please contact us with questions or comments, or to indicate your interest in our work or proposed work.

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RESEARCH TEAM G: Evolution of Communities as Complex Systems
by Mark Ottenberg mark@riverrock.org

Diverse communities demonstrate an amazingly similar set of dynamics and evolutionary paths. What are they? What are the stages of evolution for these complex systems? What are the conditions that are necessary to allow a community to evolve from one step to the next??? Let's examine known communities in light of ISI principles to learn what we can.

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PLEASE NOTE: This is the final newsletter to announce research teams! New teams are still welcome to form. Current teams are likely to grow and change in the next months. Please contact a team coordinator to show interest. Our next scheduled newsletter is the September conference bulletin.



REGISTRATION FOR OUR ANNUAL CONVERSATION:

THE ASILOMAR CONVERSATION CONFERENCE FOR 2004

SAVE THESE DATES: Sunday, November 14 through Friday, November 19, 2004

What follows is some information about our Asilomar Conversation Conference for 2004, our annual event sponsored by the International Systems Institute and the Asilomar Conversation Community:

The dates are 11/14/2004 to 11/19/2004. Our first meal at the center is dinner on the 14th; our last meal is lunch on the 19th. Since we need to make periodic deposits six and three months in advance of the conference, we need to collect an initial payment by May 15, and the remainder by August 15. We have both single and double occupancy rooms available. The single rooms will be assigned on a first-come first-served basis. Please submit your initial deposit covering lodging for the first day and \$85 (\$35 registration and \$50 fellowship fee) by May 15 and the balance by August 15.

The rates include lodging in the historic rooms and three daily meals. Rates and total costs are as follows:

Single \$138.39/day (5 days = \$691.95 + \$85 = total cost \$776.95)
Double \$90.55/day (5 days = \$452.75 + \$85 = total cost \$537.75)

This information and more information (e.g., for or triple/family rates) is available at: http://www.visitasilomar.com/pdf/Asilomar_GroupRateSheet_2004.pdf

Checks should be made out to International Systems Institute with "Asilomar Systems Conference" in the memo and mailed to Geri Walton at 619 Travois Circle, Livermore, CA, 94550. (Contact her at geri@networkeddemocracy.com). If you wish to pay the fees electronically or through direct bank transfers, the account information is as follows:

Wires should go to:

International Systems Institute
Wells Fargo Bank
235 South K Street
Livermore, CA 94550
Account: 3444-333656
Routing: 121042882

DATES TO REMEMBER: MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Due May 15, 2004	Deposit and Registration for accommodations for ISI/ACC
July 4-9, 2004	ISSS 2004 Conference at Asilomar, see www.issss.org
Due August 15, 2004	Remainder of payment for accommodations for ISI/ACC
November 11-19, 2004	Asilomar Conversation Conference (ISI/ACC), Pacific Grove