

ISI Conversations

Newsletter of the International Systems Institute | June 2005

16th Annual Asilomar Conversation Conference: November 4-9, 2005

The Asilomar Experience

The Asilomar Conversation Conference is open by invitation to anyone who is interested in the betterment of society through the application or development of systems thinking. This has brought together a rich and diverse community that includes professors, business managers, researchers, community leaders, social activists, consultants, authors, graduate students, and others from all walks of life. The community offers attendees the opportunity to:

- Network with other influential, innovative systems scholars and practitioners.
- Rejuvenate and reflect with a supportive community in a beautiful setting.
- Participate in authentic dialogue about matters of vital interest to a sustainable society.
- Publish research results to the web in a scholarly format.

The conference is held at the Asilomar Conference Center in Pacific Grove, California. The Asilomar Conference Center is situated on a beautiful, wooded site overlooking the Pacific Ocean.



Research teams usually conduct intense design conversation during the day in small breakout rooms equipped with wood burning fireplaces. Also, there is ample opportunity for walking along the ocean or heading over to the beach to watch the sunset. In the evening, activities with the whole conference community serve to integrate ideas and offer opportunities for networking.

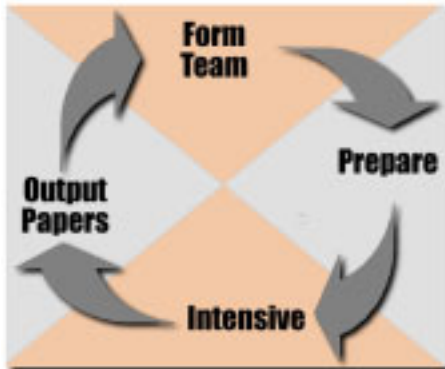
“We have been coming to Asilomar for over 10 years! One of the drivers for coming are the challenges that Bela H. Banathy presented us with. They were frustrating and we were never certain of what was going to come of the ideas, concepts and challenges we were wrestling with. [...] We stretched our minds and hearts around these concepts, experiencing their power in depth and again learned more than we thought possible.”

—Judith Bach, Ph.D. &

Christine Wailand Harrison, Ph.D.

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The Year-Round Asilomar Conversation Process

Although the conference itself is conducted face-to-face over five days, the Asilomar Conversation is actually a year-round process that begins in early spring and builds toward the fall session.

In early spring, topics for teams are proposed and teams are formed. Sometimes, teams are ongoing from the previous year; other times, they are started fresh.

During the months before the conference, teams begin their dialogue virtually, using email and a web-based discussion board.

During the conference, teams meet face-to-face for the “intensive phase.”

After the conference, teams compile reports that are posted in the conference proceedings on the website.

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Program Announcement and Team Identification & Selection.

This issue of the ISI Newsletter includes 2005 Conference information, team announcements and registration information. Contact the team facilitators if you plan to participate on a certain team.

Visit the ISI website for the details of the year-round process for the Asilomar Conversation Conference:

www.isiconversations.org

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.

The International Systems Institute is a member of the International Federation for Systems Research, Wien, Austria

Team Topics for the 2005 Asilomar Conversation Conference

Team A: Systems Thinking & Dialogue Practice: Methods for creating healthy futures.

Coordinator: Doug Walton, Ph.D.
(doug@networkeddemocracy.com)

Team (to date): David Gutzwiller, Dinesh Chandra, Sherryl Stalinski

The improvement of human well being at all levels, from families to global society, is confounded by complex and conflicting agendas. Struggles for power, conflicts over religion and values, differing opinions about which options are better than others, and the multitude of diverse perspectives on every aspect of life makes the agreement about how to move forward toward a better future society problematic. Yet, to really improve our human existence together, whether between friends and family, or between nations requires authentic dialogue. Even when we have engaged in dialogue, how do we reach agreement about complex and emotional topics? How can we do this in a fair and ethical manner that respects the rights of every one involved? For this, Dr. Bela Banathy offered design conversation as a means of fostering genuine collaboration that could result in joint action toward a better, shared future.

Design Conversation is about designing human systems that are capable of ongoing evolution. The foundational principles of systems research, the criteria for systemic viability and an understanding of the dimensions of our human systems effectively integrate an emphasis on thinking systemically during a dialogue process, whether generative or strategic.

Banathy (1996, 2000, 2002) first introduced the process of “design conversation” as an integration of generative and strategic dialogue, differentiating—then integrating—two core dialogue processes. Design Conversation is a purposeful dialogue with the intention of designing a future system. Generative dialogue seeks to generate a

shared vision, explore and articulate shared values and create commitment and community among a group of stakeholders engaged in the discourse. Generative dialogue answers the question of “what” and “why.” Strategic dialogue refers to the purpose or action and objective of the discourse; it answers “who, how and when.”

This team will explore the design conversation process by using it as a process of inquiry into the topics of dialogue and systems thinking. This is the ideal team selection for anyone new to dialogue process, systems thinking and the conversation conference model.

Team B: Building Systemic Alignment for Action

Coordinators: Harry Bury, Ph.D.
(HBury@bw.edu) and John Adams, Ph.D.:
(johndadams@worldnet.att.net)

Team (to date): Patrick Stalinski

Join us for an interactive experience in which people from diverse walks of life engage in honest and open conversation and learn together.

Our dialogue will focus on Building Systemic Alignment For Action (BSAFA). Its inspiration arises from last year’s Asilomar Conference in which our team concluded that the old bias against “preaching to the choir” was perhaps actually the way to go as we journey into the 21st century.

Rather than focus on the “naysayers” and the “cynics,” we seek to ask the question, How can we reach and be reached by Cultural Creatives, Supporters, “The Hummers” (those ready to join the choir)?

Paul Ray (The Integral Culture Study, 1996), indicates that 25% or so of the US population are “Cultural Creatives” and even a higher percentage exists in Europe; people who are thinking and feeling differently; people who are competent and committed towards improving our way of life and

providing for a sustainable future. Paul Ray's research suggests, however, that these Cultural Creatives view themselves as oddities and often perceive themselves as alone in their thinking and feeling, not knowing that there are many people who share their views and are having similar experiences.

Hence, we will gather at the 16th annual 2005 Asilomar Conversation Conference at Pacific Grove, California, November 4 - 9 seeking to forge a new direction utilizing systems thinking and creating a better society.

Through dialogue the team will respond to the following questions among others:

1. Is there a way to reach out to the Cultural Creatives, "The Hummers," so that they come to realize that they are not a "weird" minority, but a powerful source for personal and societal change?
2. From a Meta Systems perspective, how do we influence and facilitate change in the larger system?
3. How do we experience more and more of the whole in the present and manage to make it part of our evolving consciousness?
4. How do we commit to the continued development of collective awareness and to increasing alternatives for collective action?
5. Do we need to change some of our deepest assumptions—assumptions shared by virtually all modern societies—in order to contribute to life as a whole, the whole system?
6. If life for many of us in organizations is merely being an instrument to serve something other than life and in the process lose our feelings and our ability to sense, what can we do about it in a sustained manner?

(Team members are invited to submit other questions.)

We invite those of you who find these questions intriguing to register at your earliest convenience for the Asilomar Conversation Conference and indicate that you would like to participate on Team B: BSAFA.

"The process was marvelous, and I found myself looking forward to every session — something I rarely do at conferences."

— John D. Adams, Ph.D.

Team C: Designing Community

Coordinator: Christine Wailand Harrison, Ph.D.
(cwailand@npgcable.com)

Team (to date): Judith Bach, Ph.D.

We invite you to join our ongoing work in learning to create community in the places where we work, where we live and where we play. As the speed of our lives is continuing to increase, we need to come together and remember how to connect with each other. Our human experience depends on it and a better society may depend on it. Would it not be possible to create a better society by creating systems of communities? Where to begin?

History, spiritual practices, along with the social sciences have drawn diverse pictures of communities and reflected on their importance. If we could design one, what values should guide it, what requirements should it heed, and how should it ideally function.

We welcome anyone with interest in the topic area. An understanding of Systems Design is desirable. Please contact the research team coordinator for suggested pre-reading. An input paper on your vision of an ideal community is encouraged. Input papers may also cover other community-related topic areas. Feel free to make this your opportunity to explore ideas and concepts.

There is currently an ongoing e-conversation with a participant in the UK who is working on an alternative approach to business, guided by a common wealth i.e. workers hold the company's wealth in common. There is a need for a new business model.

Please join Dr. Judith Bach and myself in this conversation.

Team F: Co-operated Roundtables for Schools, Workplaces, and Other Organizations or Communities

Coordinators: Sue Gabriele, Ph.D.

(sgabriele@gemsllearning.com),

Team (to date): Ted Ferguson

(trf@gemsllearning.com), Diana Ryan

(dianafryan@msn.com), Peggy Gill

(pgill@uttyler.edu)

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 last few years, the team has worked to [1] to continue to locate opportunities for Roundtables and



Roundtable research; [2] to create

Roundtable promotional pieces, proposals, guides, workbooks, and/or starter kits for interested and potential users;

and [3] to continue developing the ³Roundtable Program² in general and at our work sites back home.

Our goals in 2005: With regard to ISI and ACC, we see these possible developments for our "Roundtable" work during the November ACC conversation.

First, we will offer a formal Roundtable Research Team for those people interested in working more in depth with the Roundtable theory and practice. Sue and Ted continue their focus on offering Roundtables in local schools and other interested communities. Diana continues developing the Roundtable for her workplaces: two universities in Chicago. Peggy develops the Roundtable in her classes at a university in Tyler, Texas. We are also considering doing formal research on the Roundtable as it is used at Asilomar ISI.

Second we will continue offering the daily 45-minute Roundtable, open to all attending the conference--both those interested in the Roundtable as a new systems tool, and those who simply want a morning opportunity to connect and reflect in this way. We are open to changing its time from 7:15 AM to 7:15 PM, adapting it for a whole group activity in the evening. In this way we could bring back a short (30 or 45 minute) whole community evening team report, adding value to it with emancipatory features of the Roundtable. We anticipate three benefits in this possibility: [1] whole group connection with ongoing team and individual progress reports, [2] the opportunity for later risers to experience the Roundtable benefits, and [3] time for creative play in the evening: i.e., international singing night, line dancing, whatever emerges!

Please contact us with questions or comments, or to indicate your interest in our work or proposed work.

IFSR 2005

The New Roles of Systems Sciences

The First International Congress of the International Federation for Systems Research

November 14- 17, 2005

International Conference Centre
Kobe, Japan

Systems Engineering Society of China
Konan University

J. Kepler University Linz

Details on the program:

<http://www.sea.uni-linz.ac.at/ifsr05/>
or <http://ifsr2005.jtbcom.co.jp/>

The ISI Story and a Warm Welcome

by Tad G. Frantz, Ph.D.

ISI was born out of the recognition that academic, scientific and professional conferences seem to offer scant opportunities for colleagues to confer, to converse. Typically, a minority of participants deliver prepared presentations to a relatively passive majority. Except for brief Q & A opportunities, interchange among participants is rarely found on the official schedule. That which does occur is self-organized, informal and wedged into the interstices of the "real" program. Presenting is almost always more prestigious than listening, and some presentations carry greater prestige than others. Traditionally, the prestigious experts disseminate pre-packaged new ideas to the others, who are encouraged to take home and use whatever they find valid or promising.

Such hierarchical knowledge distribution systems greatly constrain us in addressing humanity's most pressing and complex issues, issues about which we are not merely concerned, but also outraged. Of course, at traditional conferences it is understood that scholars should approach issues objectively-- without emotional involvement.

Bela H. Banathy had a different vision for scholarly gatherings, one which could more fully harness the collective potential of groups. What if all participants were designated presenters and given the opportunity to send prepared papers to the others in advance? And what if extended, in-depth, non-hierarchical conversation among them became the program? And what if systems scholars from all over the world focused their conversation together in order to put their expertise actively into the service of humanity world-wide? Dr. Banathy established the ISI and inaugurated its first scholarly gathering at Fuschl Am See, Austria in 1982 to find out. Since then we have called our gatherings "conversations" to distinguish them from traditional conference formats. Participants come to ISI Conversations more to cooperate in making serviceable knowledge than to disperse or gather it, though they are welcome to do both. As Dr.

Banathy puts it, "We aspire to reap the 'reflecting and creating power' of groups that emerges in the course of disciplined and focused conversations on issues that are important to us and to our society."

A Warm Welcome to All Who Share Our Vision

We warmly welcome all systems and design scholars and practitioners who share our aspirations. Newcomers of our five-day conversations will find a relaxed, casual and friendly atmosphere. Experienced participants offer the following suggestions:

Be open-minded, stay "loose", and be patient. Try to establish a relationship with someone who has been here before, and have short, but regular, debriefings (one-on-one) about the day's experiences. With our combined efforts, we believe we can make a difference in our world for the better. We will help you grow professionally and we invite you to help us become what is the best of humanity.

Think of the conversation as a total-immersion environment in which you eat breathe, and live the ideas of systems design as they pertain to the human condition. As with any such environment, it is both luxurious to wallow in the inspirations that bubble up through you and those around you, and at the same time overwhelming as you try to catch the various currents of thought that often spin you around and leave you wondering where you really stand on a given issue. The best idea is to "go with the flow" and trust that meanings will emerge-- if not during the conversation then after. Perhaps the most important thing to remember is also the most challenging: don't forget to take the design culture home with you. Keep the conversation alive, both with your group and with others in your daily environment, so that you never really "leave" the conversation. That is the goal toward which every participant strives.

November
4 - 9, 2005
Pacific
Grove
California

2005 Asilomar Conversation Conference

16th Annual Conference on the Comprehensive Design of Social Systems

Registration and Fee Information

Please fill out this form for each person participating in the conference. (Other people, such as children or spouses, who are staying with you but not participating, do not need a separate form.)

Contact Information

Name _____

Physical Address _____

Primary Phone _____

Secondary Phone _____

Email Address _____

Room Type

Indicate how you will participate. All participation types include fees to Asilomar, conference fees for operating expenses, and a fellowship fee. Check

____ **Single Room.** Includes meals provided from Friday night to Wednesday lunch. Cost \$820.

____ **Double (Shared) Room.** Room is shared with another person, arranged by you or by ISI, if possible. Meals are provided from Friday night to Wednesday lunch. Cost \$578.

____ Non-participating roommate, add \$460

Roommate\Guest Name (if known):

Availability of Doubles: Requests for doubles can only be honored if a suitable roommate can be found. If not, you will have to switch to a single and pay the difference. If no roommate is available, you will be notified by July 20, 2005.

____ **Offsite participant.** You can book your own accommodations, but there are still conference and fellowship fees. (Meals can be purchased from the lodge on a daily basis). Cost \$125.

Other Information

Circle the appropriate answer below

Gender of Participant	Male	Female
Vegetarian Participant?	Yes	No
Vegetarian Guest?	Yes	No

Other Notes:

Please contact us if any of the following apply:

- As the conference involves an intense dialogue experience, full participation is strongly encouraged. However, sometimes circumstances require participants to come late or leave early.
- You wish to stay with children who are between 3 to 17 years old
- You have more than 1 guest who wishes to stay in the same room with you
- You have any other accommodation needs or requests

Research Team

(See the ACC Newsletter for the current list of research teams.)

I would like to participate on research team:

Or,

____ At this time I know I am interested in social systems design and will be attending the 2005 conference, but I have not yet decided on a topic and plan to contact the team coordinators or the conference coordinator for further information.

Payment Deadlines

A limited number of rooms have been reserved for the conference. A deposit of your registration, fellowship fee and one night will guarantee your room (\$184 double, \$232 single). The balance must be paid by August 1, 2005.

Cancellation Policy: You may cancel and receive a full refund up to August 1, 2005. After that, a refund will be dependent on being able to fill the room.

Contact Information

**Mail registration forms and payments to International Systems Institute
619 Travis Circle, Livermore, CA 94550, USA.**

For questions and to make special arrangements, please contact the conference coordinator,
Christine Wailand Harrison cwailand@npgcable.com