

Goodbye 2020, hello 2021! I am sure that for many if not all of you, closing the book on 2020 could not have come soon enough. It was in many ways a challenging year, and while challenges remain, each day brings us closer to a return to normalcy, though what the 'new normal' will look like remains to be seen.

The Institute's 2020 ended with a flourish. The Annual Conference saw 1,040 registrations, better than fifty percent more than had been conservatively planned for, and close to the typical 1100-1300. The Doctoral Student Consortium, which was for the first time held prior to the conference, saw 196 student participants, more than double that of recent years. Having a longer planning horizon than our peer organizations in moving to the virtual world presumably raised expectations, yet the feedback received during and after the conference has been almost unanimously positive. Planning for the 2021 conference is already under way, and we expect to announce details of the conference format in the coming weeks. If you cannot wait until fall for a DSI conference, NEDSI and EDSI will host virtual conferences in March and May, respectively. Full details can be found on the DSI website.

Membership numbers are also ahead of expectations. Renewals often go hand-in-hand with conference registrations, and while regular membership has fallen, it is by a far smaller margin than anticipated, and overall membership is consistent with an increasing five-year trend. Taken together with the conference numbers, this demonstrates the commitment of DSI members to the Institute, and to a broader confidence in our ability to deliver a high-quality conference experience.

Work on our much-needed brand analysis has begun in earnest. At its November meeting, the DSI Board voted to engage Communications Strategy Group (CSG), a Denver based outfit, to carry out the analysis. Several Board members met last month with the CSG team to get to know each other and make sure all are on the same page regarding the path forward. In the coming weeks, CSG will reach out to a variety of DSI stakeholders as a prelude to providing their insights to the Board later in the spring. This is an exciting first step in ensuring the DSI brand is fully leveraged.

Another initiative that is getting underway is to develop better process infrastructure to support our journal editors. Those who have served as editors know there is much to the role that you only learn on the job. That doesn't mean we can't do better during recruitment and onboarding. Having seated three new editors in the last year, this is an opportune time for us to critically evaluate and improve editorial processes, document operating procedures, and otherwise lay a foundation to better communicate expectations and transfer knowledge and wisdom. Elevating the stature of our journals depend both on having the right editors (which we do!) and sharing process knowledge that sets editors up for success.

At the end of this month elections for new Board positions will take place. There is no more important function of the Institute than to cultivate future leaders, and no more important role of the membership than to elect officers that will continue to move us forward. I am excited by the slate of candidates who are running for office. Each has in their own way demonstrated a deep commitment to the Institute, whether by prior Board service, committee leadership, or engagement within one of our organizational units. I am confident that, if elected, they will act in the best interests of the organization, and help sustain a Board culture characterized by action, accountability, and respect.

As we get ready to embark on a new semester or quarter, I wish you well, and hope that the coming months are fulfilling, engaging, and most importantly, healthy!

Vijay R. Kannan
President, DSI