

# ACM SIGIR Annual Business Meeting 2006: Secretary's Notes

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## I. Opening Matters

The 2006 ACM SIGIR Annual Business Meeting took place on Tuesday, 9 August 2006, at the SIGIR 2006 conference in Seattle, Washington, USA. The meeting was led by the ACM SIGIR Chair, Jamie Callan. The Secretary (Dave Lewis) was also in attendance, while the Vice-Chair (Fabrizio Sebastiani) and Treasurer (Justin Zobel) were unable to attend. The SIGIR EC can be reached at [sigir-ec@acm.org](mailto:sigir-ec@acm.org). These Executive Committee (EC) members began a 2-year term in 2003, which was extended by 2 years at the SIGIR 2004 Business Meeting as allowed by the by-laws.

Also in attendance was Noriko Kando, the Asian Regional Representative to the EC. The current EC has members from Europe and Australia, so there are no Regional Representatives from these areas. (The current EC has an informal policy to have Regional Representatives from each region of significant SIGIR membership that is not represented by an EC officer.)

Jamie also greatly thanked Mounia Lalmas (the SIGIR webmaster and information office), Raman Chandrasekar (SIG-IRList editor), Peter Anick & Ian Ruthven (editors of SIGIR Forum), Edie Rasmussen (SIGIR liaison to the Joint Conference on Digital Libraries), and Alistair Moffat (SIGIR Awards Chair).

## II. Reports

Jamie began by reviewing SIGIR membership, which showed a 9% drop last year after growing for the past five years. Causes of the drop appear to include an ACM glitch which resulted in SIGIR 2005 attendees not being enrolled, usual lack of renewals by some new members enrolled as a result of attending SIGIR 2004, and possibly the dues increase. The EC will be working with ACM to address the first problem, and will be monitoring the situation.

Jamie then reviewed finances, showing the SIGIR bank balance had dropped by \$38K. The major factor was a drop in conference income. SIGIR 05 in Brazil was profitable, but less so than other recent SIGIRs (due in part to unfavorable exchange rates). JCDL 05 was barely profitable, and CIKM 05 profits were not yet known. Student travel costs were also \$10K higher for Brazil, and the SIGIR dues increase (which is meant to make us somewhat less dependent on conference income) had not taken effect in this period.

A major expense of SIGIR is mailing a copy of the conference proceedings to all members as special issue of SIGIR Forum. As usual, a business meeting attendee asked whether they could save SIGIR some money by not having the proceedings mailed to them. Unfortunately ACM has indicated that such an optional procedure would be more expensive than the current one. Fortunately, for SIGIR 07 and beyond this mailing will be a DVD rather than a printed proceedings, which will save considerable postage. (Conference attendees will get both printed and DVD proceedings at the conference, and will get a second DVD mailed to them.) An audience member suggested that DVDs are already passé and perhaps the proceedings should be on cheap flash memory drives. Jamie indicated the EC will look into this.

We also lose money on the SIGIR proceedings package (which contains printed proceedings of SIGIR, CIKM, and JCDL). However, this option is very popular (though thankfully growth has leveled off) and is believed to attract members. The program will be continued, though likely with price increases every two years (including in 2007), until the price is sufficient for the program to pay for itself (or popularity drops sufficiently to discontinue the program). However, we are encouraging people to transition to the DiSC program. This is a DVD with a large number of database-related proceedings (including SIGIR, CIKM, and JCDL) and newsletters. Cost is \$10/year, but it may not be mentioned on your SIGIR or ACM renewal forms: ask for it by name.

Overall, SIGIR is financially healthy, and should stay so as some of the above changes take effect. We're doing very well compared to other ACM SIGs, and ACM has not been concerned with us.

### III. SIGIR Services

Jamie reviewed services SIGIR provides to its members:

- SIGIR Forum (paper and online): Your suggestions and, even more, your content are solicited. See <http://www.acm.org/sigs/sigir/forum>.
- Reduced Conference Registration: SIGIR members receive “member” rate registration (or whatever registration rate is cheapest) at all SIGIR-sponsored and “in cooperation” conferences.
- Access to IR-related content in ACM Digital Library.
- Optional SIGIR Proceedings and DiSC Packages (see discussion above).
- Optional SIGIR CD: 25 Years of SIGIR Proceedings, 1978-2002.
- Student Travel Awards: The amount awarded in 2006 was US \$41,450, which included US \$2,500 from IBM and UK pounds 4500 from BCS-IRSG (both of whom Jamie thanked). The support from BCS-IRSG was a recycling of some of

the profits of SIGIR 04 in Sheffield, UK. A total of 54 students were supported (down from 35 in 2004), of whom 36 came from North America, 6 from Australia/Asia, 10 from Europe, and 2 from South America. Except where external grants allow otherwise, student travel support will probably be in the range of \$25-30K/year in the future. (*Secretary's Note: Information on SIGIR Student Travel awards is made available to authors of accepted papers, posters, and demos for each SIGIR Conference.*)

- Best Paper and Best Student Paper Awards: SIGIR (the organization, not the conference) presents awards for Best Paper and, if author of best paper is not a student, Best Student Paper at each SIGIR Conference. The 2006 Best Paper and Best Student Paper Awards was sponsored by IBM, whom Jamie thanked.
- The SIG-IRList newsletter. (*Secretary's Note: And the SIGIR-ANNOUNCE email list for notifications from the SIGIR information officer.*)
- The SIGIR Doctoral Forum: Jamie thanked Nick Belkin and Wanda Pratt for their work on the third SIGIR Doctoral Forum, which was run on Sunday, 6 August 2006 (the tutorial day) at SIGIR 2006. A group of PhD students was invited, based on their applications, to present their dissertation ideas and get feedback from experienced IR researchers and other students. The forum will be run again next year. Comments on this program are encouraged and should be directed to Nick and Wanda.

(*Secretary's Note: SIGIR also maintains the SIGIR website (<http://www.sigir.org/>), which is available to everyone.*)

## **IV. Initiatives, Issues, and Directions**

### ***IV.A. Paper vs. Plastic***

As mentioned above, beginning in 2007 the "Special Issue" of SIGIR Forum consisting of the SIGIR proceedings will be on DVD rather than paper. Conference attendees will still receive paper proceedings. The EC is still paying attention to the continued growth of the proceedings, but there was less discussion of this than at the SIGIR 2006 business meeting.

### ***IV.B. Bylaws?***

The SIGIR By-Laws have not been changed (or much looked at) for 10-15 years and bear no relation to the current situation and procedures of the organizations. The EC will be rewriting the bylaws to make them consistent with current practice, and put them up for a vote at the same time as the election of EC members (see below). Comments are very welcome. If approved, the bylaws will take effect when the new EC takes over (July 1, 2007).

Many ACM SIGs are shifting to three year terms for EC members, and it is likely the revised bylaws will propose this as a change. (SIGIR currently has a two year term for EC members, with the option for the SIGIR Business Meeting to extend those terms for an additional two years.)

An attendee suggested that a president-elect position on the EC might be useful. Jamie observed the preceding president of SIGIR has typically stayed on the EC mailing list to provide advice, and we would consider formalizing this.

#### ***IV.C. Preserving Our History***

SIGIR is pursuing a new initiative to identify, scan, and make available hard-to-find early IR papers, reports, and books. Materials will be distributed through the ACM Digital Library, as well as through open access means. Donna Harman is leading this project, and interested parties should contact her. Donna is particularly interested in suggestions on what to do with materials once they (and copyright clearances) have been obtained. Donna asked particular for help from anyone who has negotiated copyright issues before, and anyone with contacts at Prentice-Hall or McGraw-Hill.

An attendee suggested that along with the materials we should provide some historical context (i.e. a description of why they are worth saving). An attendee ask if ACM has a role in preserving this material. Jamie said that the ACM Digital Library had been contacted, and they are not interested in this material. Other SIGs have similar concerns though, so there may be a role for ACM outside of the Digital Library.

#### ***IV.D. SIGIR Elections***

The terms of the current EC members expire June 30, 2007, and so there will be an election for new EC members, with ballots mailed February 28, 2007 and results announced April 30, 2007. Ellen Voorhees is in charge of recruiting candidates, who will be announced on the *SIGIR-ANNOUNCE* mailing list around November 30, 2006.

### **V. Conferences**

Jamie reviewed upcoming conferences that ACM SIGIR is sponsoring, or has in-cooperation arrangements with. There are financial differences for ACM SIGIR between the two arrangements, but in both cases ACM SIGIR members get to attend the conference at the lowest (“member”) registration rate.

SIGIR sponsored conferences (past, present, and future) include SIGIR 04 to 09, CIKM 05 and 06 (co-sponsored with SIGWEB in 2006), and JCDL 05 to 07 (co-sponsored with SIGWEB and IEEE TCDL). Recent “In cooperation” conferences included AIRS 2005, CORIA 2005, CIVR 2005, and ECIR 2005. See [www.sigir.org](http://www.sigir.org) for details on upcoming conferences.

### ***V.A. Past, Present, and Future SIGIR Conferences***

Nivio Ziviani reviewed the SIGIR 2005 conference, held in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. This was the first SIGIR in South America, and there were 309 attendees. The conference was profitable, despite problems caused by devaluation of the US dollar, and returned \$12,651 to SIGIR. Devaluation of the dollar did lead to the serving of cheaper wine, but no complaints were received on this issue. Profits were used for student travel to the 2006 conference.

Efthimis Efthimiadis discussed SIGIR 2006, which even based on preliminary statistics available at the time was clearly the largest SIGIR ever, a fact which was received to great applause. Final figures for SIGIR 2006 were 74 papers accepted from 399 submissions, 63 poster (152 submissions), 11 demos (17 submissions), 8 tutorials (15 submissions), 9 doctoral consortium participants (18 submissions), and 9 workshops (13 submissions). There were 710 attendees (630 full conference registrations, 252 tutorial registrations, and 311 workshop registrations). The greatest number of attendees were from the United States (478), with Canada (28), the UK (28), China (27), Germany (15), Australia (14), Japan (14), and the Netherlands (13) with more than 10 attendees. A total of 324 new members of ACM SIGIR (192 regular, 132 student) were registered due to attending SIGIR 2006.

Wessel Kraaij made a presentation on preparations for SIGIR 2007, including the understatement “Amsterdam caters for interesting nightlife”. The conference will be held from 23 to 27 July, 2007 at the grand hotel Krasnapolsky, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Schiphol Airport is a major European hub (30 minutes from the venue by public transportation), and Amsterdam can also be reached by high-speed trains from France and Germany. See <http://www.sigir2007.org/> for many more details, including an RSS feed.

Mun-Kew Leong discussed plans for SIGIR 2008, to be held in Singapore, and reviewed recent round trip air fares (\$250 to \$900), facts about Singapore (English speaking, very very near the Equator, very very air conditioned), possible venues (including world’s tallest hotel), and possible dates (13-18 July, 20-25 July, and 27 July to 1 August). Many, many pictures of food were shown.

Jay Aslam discussed plans for SIGIR 2009 in Boston. It will probably be in the Copley Square area, with tutorials, workshops, etc. probably at Northeastern University.

Mounia Llamas, plus guys in kilts, presented a proposal by University of Glasgow and Queen Mary College – University of London to hold SIGIR 2010 in Glasgow, Scotland. Jamie encouraged additional proposals.

## ***V.B. Sponsored and Other Conferences***

Jamie reported that CIKM 2005 was probably profitable, but we haven't heard from ACM yet. There were 425 submitted papers and an acceptance rate of 18%. CIKM 2005 was in Bremen, Germany. CIKM has adopted a model where they alternate between the Washington, DC area and other locations. CIKM 2006 will be in Arlington, Virginia, USA.

JCDL 2005 was profitable, but just barely so, returning \$127 to SIGIR. JCDL attendance had declined in recent years and appeared to be stabilizing around 300 people. However, Gary Marchionini announced that JCDL 06 (which took place in June 2006 in Chapel Hill, NC, USA) had 480 attendees and would be profitable. Acceptance rate for papers was just under 30%.

Edie Rasmussen announced that JCDL 2007 will be in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. SIGIR, SIGWEB, and IEEE TCDL are 1/3<sup>rd</sup> sponsors.

Chengxiang Zhai encouraged people to submit papers to and attend HLT 2007, April 22-28, 2007 in Rochester, NY.

## **VI. Other Issues**

The meeting ended with some discussion of other issues.

### ***VI.A. Companies Sharing Data with IR Researchers***

The release by AOL, Inc. of query logs and other data sets to support information retrieval research was a hot topic both at the SIGIR 2006, and in the mainstream media and blogosphere around that time. There had been an attempt to anonymize the data, but it appeared that some users could nevertheless be identified through particular aspects of their queries.

Jamie pointed out that much of the most useful data for research is now produced by companies, and they will not share this data if it is a negative experience for them. The question is how privacy concerns can be addressed while allowing sharing of data to advance the field. Jamie mentioned there was a petition being circulated (not organized by ACM SIGIR) in support of the data release. He stressed the need to help companies share data safely, and to educate the public.

There was considerable discussion from the floor on this topic. Some suggestions, comments, etc. included:

- IBM Almaden is doing work on preserving privacy in sharing databases.
- Medical researchers have established institutional review boards. Maybe we should get advice from them.

- You can do statistical attacks against this type of data. There's a question of what sort of sample would keep one from identifying individuals. It's an interesting research problem. There's a genuine concern here even if the blogosphere has responded hysterically.
- Some universities require even analysis of secondhand data to be approved by their IRB (Institutional Review Board).
- Data which is sufficiently anonymized is exempted from IRBs at our school. But it depends who is on the IRB.
- At our school even if you're exempt you have to get the exemption.
- Currently no guidelines for what "sufficiently anonymized" means.
- There was a suggestion that the EC write a letter in support of the people within AOL who were trying to work with the research community. (*Secretary's Note: The SIGIR Chair did in fact write a letter to AOL expressing concern.*)
- SIG-IRList has gotten a lot of comments about this incident. Usually very quiet.
- The news cycle has a 8 hour half life. If we're going to make any public statement we need to do it now.
- There was a privacy problem in CLEF this year. People were including snippets of personal information in their papers that they weren't supposed to.
- Every research community is doing search now. We need to approach other communities about this.

In addition, Maria Zemankova from the US National Science Foundation said that privacy issues are covered under human subject policies and IRBs. Maria asks that people submitting NSF proposals address these issues explicitly in their proposal.

Jamie mentioned that NSF had sent out a "Dear Colleague" letter on research on privacy and data sets.

Also, Rosie Jones mentioned she was involved with planning a workshop on privacy issues in sharing data even before this incident, and this increases the likelihood of the workshop going forward.

### ***VI.B. Other Issues***

There was a suggestion that an ACM student research competition be held at SIGIR. Apparently some other SIGs have done this.

There was a comment that the SIGIR 2006 program didn't let one see as high a proportion of the papers as in the past. It was suggested to cut down on the business meeting or keynote talks. Efthi commented on the difficulty of dealing with the large number of papers.