

Women in IR

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Abstract

Summarizing a year of activity of Women in IR, an initiative that aims to support and promote female researchers in information retrieval.

Our Mission

Women in IR facilitates networking and mentoring opportunities within the community, enabling a platform for efficient communication within the community. Our mission is to attract women to the field of IR research and ensure they stick around. We analyze gender-reflecting data science oddities to scout for enactable solutions.

Female Role Models

Information retrieval has had strong women in the field from its start. Information Retrieval has also had a strong focus on evaluation since its start, and women have been a big part of that emphasis. The most obvious woman in the field was Karen Spärck Jones. She had very broad contributions to the field, including evaluation: she edited and wrote several chapters for “Information Retrieval Experiment” published in 1981, she and van Rijsbergen authored the original work on pooling that allowed larger test collections to be built, she was a very active member of the Text Retrieval Conference (TREC) program committee and wrote several overviews of TREC including a piece for the TREC book. Jean Tague-Sutcliffe wrote on IR evaluation, including a chapter in the Information Retrieval Experiment book and an article in the Information Processing and Management (IPM) special issue on evaluation. Donna Harman edited that special issue of IPM and started TREC. Ellen Voorhees has been running TREC since 1996, and Harman and Voorhees co-edited and wrote chapters for the TREC book. Sue Dumais is another woman with broad contributions to the field, including a strong interest in evaluation (both Spärck Jones and Dumais are Salton award winners as well as Athena award winners). Carol Peters was the main force behind the Conference and

Labs of the Evaluation Forum (CLEF). Mounia Lalmas was a co-organizer of Initiative for the Evaluation of XML Retrieval (INEX) and is now director of research at Yahoo! Yoelle Maarek, vice president at Yahoo and the head of Yahoo Research, was elected Fellow of the ACM for nurturing industry connections of the field. Noriko Kando is the force behind NII Testbeds and Community for Information access Research (NTCIR). Diane Kelly, Professor at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and known for her work on search behavior and interactive IR, took office as the Chair of the ACM SIGIR Executive Committee. This is not a complete list of women in the field by any means, but does show that there have been highly visible women throughout IR's history.

Women in IR Meeting at the 39th ACM SIGIR

The 39th ACM SIGIR conference in Pisa, Italy, hosted the 4th meeting of Women in IR, an initiative that aims to further career chances and promote visibility of women in information retrieval. Prof. Laura Dietz from the University of New Hampshire and Ph.D. Candidate Shiri Dori-Hacohen from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, the co-founders of women in IR, conducted the meeting that hosted over 70 researchers, including a portion (over 15%) of male supporters.

At the meeting, several women presented their research. We are proud of the diversity of topics in the group covering all IR topics. These talks were delivered by the following researchers. Myungha Jang from the University of Massachusetts on controversy detection on the web to automatically warn users when visiting a web page discussing controversial topics; Shiri Dori-Hacohen also from the University of Massachusetts on controversy detection in Wikipedia using collective classification; Ida Mele from the Università della Svizzera Italiana (USI) on asynchronous and heterogeneous topic mining; Manisha Verma from University College London presented on understanding and characterizing user search effort; Elinor Bronzwin from the Technion - Israel Institute of Technology on utilizing focused relevant feedback to improve retrieval effectiveness; Ekaterina Shabunina from the University of Milano-Bicocca on the issue of information propagation in social media; Sole Pera and Nevena Dragovic from the Boise State University on enhancing IR applications for non-traditional users, and improving recommender systems; Anastasia Giachanou from the Università della Svizzera italiana (USI) on sentiment tracking over time for monitoring a brand sentiment; Hadas Raviv from the Technion - Israel Institute of Technology discussed entity based retrieval; Laura Dietz from the University of New Hampshire on knowledge consolidation and organization for query-specific Wikipedia construction, with the goal of composing an entire encyclopedia article.

A discussion on the needs of the Women in IR community revealed that any kind of support regarding the difficulty of the day-to-day life of researchers is highly appreciated. Ranging from “How can I make it through this Ph.D.?” through “How did other researchers successfully tackle difficult situations?” to “How to maneuver a male-dominated community?”, it turns out that many questions of how to be successful are often left unanswered at community meetings.

Several participants are hoping for a mentoring program that goes along conferences or an introduction service for new-comers. Women in IR is considering offering such a match-making service at future meetings. Recipes for how to best encourage women to come and stay through incentives and funding need to be elaborated in the future.

We are happy to hear from Yuka Egusa and Emi Ishita that fathers and mothers will find a child care facility at the 40th ACM SIGIR meeting.

Other Meetings

Women in IR was formed in August 2015, and has hosted several meetings in conferences, beginning with a coffee break at SIGIR 2015 in Santiago, Chile, attended by 29 female researchers, followed by a second meeting that included ten women at ICTIR 2015 in Northampton, Massachusetts, and a third meeting in ECIR 2016 in Padua, Italy, where more than 16 women got together. At ICTIR 2016 in Newark, Delaware seven women and several men discussed perceived biases, observable issues, and potential solutions.

Future Work

Moving forward, we will maintain our current activities and explore additional projects. In order to do so we need the support of volunteers. Specifically we are looking for volunteers to organize meetings in conferences, mentor, and lead initiatives that will serve our community. Supporters of both genders are welcome.

Contact

Please join our mailing list available on:

<https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/women-in-ir>.

Visit our website: <http://www.womeninir.com>.

Follow us on twitter through @WomenInIR.

If you want to support us, please contact the co-founders directly.