

Letter from the Chair

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Greetings SIGIR Members! I am pleased to be writing my first letter as SIGIR Chair, serving with **Ryen White** (Vice Chair), **Carsten Eickhoff** (Treasurer), and **Laura Dietz** (Secretary), under the patient guidance of **Ben Carterette** (Past Chair). I would like to sincerely thank the previous committee: in addition to **Ben**, **Tetsuya Sakai** (Vice Chair), **Claudia Hauff** (Secretary), **Min Zhang** (Treasurer), and **Diane Kelly** (Past Chair) for the many initiatives they accomplished during their tenure. Their term started with SIGIR in Paris, in a record 42-degree heat, followed by an extremely challenging and unexpected shift to online conferences due to the global COVID pandemic. In addition to providing guidance to conference organizers, and funding for student travel and other programs, they initiated the SIGIR Academy to recognize sustained contributions to the field (thank you to **Ryen White**, **Hannah Bast**, and **Gianluca Demartini**), the Early Career Researchers Award (thank you to **Johanne Trippas**), and the DEI checklist (thank you to **Bárbara Poblete**, **Hussein Suleman** and **Suzan Verberne**). Finally, their term welcomed the creation of a new conference (SIGIR-AP) which will be held in November/December in the Asia-Pacific, with a steering committee chaired by **Alistair Moffat** and **Yiqun Liu**. These programs represent big improvements to the recognition and representation in the SIGIR community.

SIGIR is run entirely by volunteers, and I would like to acknowledge the folks who are continuing to serve: **Alistair Moffat**, (SIGIR Academy Chair), **Hannah Bast** and **Gianluca Demartini** (Awards Chairs), **Hussein Suleman** and **Suzan Verberne** (DEI Chairs), **Tirthankar Ghosal**, **Josiane Mothe**, **Julián Urbano** (SIGIR Forum Editors), **Donna Harman** (Historian), **Nattiya Kanhabua** and **Guido Zuccon** (Information Directors), **Jiaxin Mao** (Student Affairs Chair), and **Nazli Goharian** (Women in IR Chair).

I would like to give a huge Thank You to **Jaime Arguello** who has served as the Student Travel Chair since 2015. As he is stepping down, he will hand off the position to **Sole Pera**. In addition I would like to welcome **Qingyao Ai** and **Maria Maistro** who will join **Jiaxin Mao** as Student Affairs Chairs. I would like to thank **Jaime Teevan**, for serving as the SIGIR representative on the WSDM Steering Committee, and **Fernando Diaz** who is serving on the ACM Ethics and Plagiarism Committee.

The Exec Committee created several new roles, to cover the expanding scope of SIGIR. **Bhaskar Mitra** will serve as *Community Relations Coordinator*, which is a point of contact for anyone wanting to organize an Affinity Group at a SIGIR event. Climate change is a growing concern, and in an effort to be responsible with respect to our environmental impact, we created the role of *Sustainability Chair*, which will be held by **Tetsuya Sakai** and **Paul Thomas**.

Rob Capra will Chair the newly created *Early Career Researcher Award* which recognizes contributions by people in the first seven years after the PhD. (More information can be found at <https://sigir.org/awards/sigir-ecr-awards/>). The need for volunteers is, basically, infinite, so if you are interested in volunteering, please let the Executive Committee know.

SIGIR 2022 in Madrid was the first hybrid SIGIR, also under the weight of a record breaking heat wave. We would like to thank the General Chairs **Enrique Amigó**, **Pablo Castells** and **Julio Gonzalo** and the Program Committee Chairs **Ben Carterette**, **Shane Culpepper**, and **Gabriella Kazai** for a successful conference. In addition to being the first hybrid SIGIR, it was the first to feature banquet entertainment by members of the SIGIR community. The band *Trevithick* (featuring general chairs **Julio**, and **Enrique**, as well as Social Director **Victor Fresno**) surprised us with an absolutely great performance, which included maybe the first performance of a song about BERT. The band organized memorable cameos from the community, among them a duet by **Bill Hersh** and **Ian Soboroff**, a Brazilian Bossa Nova sung by **Damiano Spina** and traditional Gascony folk songs sung in Gascon by **Josiane Mothe**.

We expect that the hybrid format will continue for the foreseeable future. COVID continues to pose a public health issue, and the hybrid option makes the conference accessible to folks who cannot travel because of the health risk, or travel restrictions. Having a virtual option opens the conference to a wider audience, and makes some of the material more accessible even for people who attend in person. The question of how to create an engaging virtual experience is still a matter of experimentation. There are many learnings from the past three years, but some of the basic challenges of participating online are unavoidable. In the next years, we will continue to experiment with improving the online experience, and developing attendance and registration policies that are equitable and affordable.

The community has several ongoing areas of interest that we will seek to address during our term. Sustainability becomes an ever more pressing issue as global climate change is accelerating. As mentioned above, we have created the role of Sustainability Chair, to develop a plan to minimize the impact of our conferences on the environment. One way to reduce the need for travel is to have more events hosted by local chapters of SIGIR. This also creates a wider community network of IR researchers, and improves the diversity of the membership. Open access has been a long-standing issue, and we are currently determining the feasibility of this for SIGIR. Finally, the reviewing system could be characterized as in crisis. As a community, we are overloaded with reviewing responsibilities, and this has a ripple effect of reducing the quality of reviews and the ability of meta-reviewers to engage reviewers in productive discussions or to enforce a minimum review quality standard.

These plans all sound great, you say, but how and when is all this getting done? Efforts for improving the sustainability of the conference, and to consider Open Access are in progress. Expanding to additional local chapters will require planning and outreach, and will not show meaningful progress until 2024. This year we are prioritizing rethinking the review process. We have several well considered proposals from members of the IR community, and we have reached out to organizers of conferences known for their high quality reviewing to learn from their experience. Changing the way our conferences manage submissions is a large undertaking, that requires input and discussion from the community. Look for a *Call for Proposals* for improving the reviewing system, posted to IRList in early January with a submission deadline in March. The executive

committee will post a tentative plan, and schedule a town hall-style meeting for discussion and comments in early summer.

Thank you all for your ideas, input and enthusiasm!

Vanessa Murdock
Chair, ACM SIGIR Executive Committee