Report on the SIGIR 2023 Session on Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity

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Abstract

For SIGIR 2023, DEI was approached from 3 perspectives: engagement with organizers on DEI aspects; DEI grants; and a DEI session at the conference. The DEI session took place on July 25 in Taipei, Taiwan and was attended by around 100 participants, mostly in-person. This year’s session form was a round-table discussion in groups. This document provides a summary of the topics discussed and recommendations made; and reflects on conference organization and grant activities.

Date: 25 July 2023.

Website: https://sigir.org/sigir2023/.

1 DEI Session

The session was opened by Suzan with a short introduction about DEI activities in the SIGIR community: the DEI checklist for conferences and other events (2020)\(^1\), recommendations for more inclusive conference presentations (2021)\(^2\), and DEI grants for people from low-income countries or with care responsibilities.

This was followed by a discussion in breakout groups (around 15 tables). The groups were asked to discuss the following topics: (1) Is diversity, equity and inclusivity important in your institution/company/country/region? (2) In your opinion, are SIGIR conferences diverse and inclusive? (3) What can SIGIR do to make everyone feel like they belong to the community? One person at each table took notes. One group had the discussion on-line at a timeslot that was suitable for the Americas and Europe. This session was led by Luca and Avijit.

\(^1\)http://sigir.org/conferences/diversity-and-inclusion/
\(^2\)https://drive.google.com/file/d/14TCY2F-C60CXMfTrXo71dDx2NqLw476b/view?usp=sharing
Chairs of 11 tables sent us a written report of the discussion in their group. We summarized the most frequently mentioned topics and recommendations as follows.  

- **Visa issues and accessibility**: Participants suggested providing more support for navigating visa-related issues, earlier notification dates (or starting visa applications before the notification) to enable this, and choosing conference locations with accessibility in mind.  
- **Financial support and travel grants**: The need for increased financial support and travel grants was emphasized, not only for attendees from low-income countries, but also for students who have a paper in the conference but limited funding to travel.  
- **Language and linguistic diversity for inclusivity**: Ideas included translation services, closed-captioning, multilingual support for presentations, and the use of bilingual session chairs.  
- **New DEI initiatives**: The importance of DEI initiatives was acknowledged. Suggestions for new activities included mentorship and networking opportunities.  

Additional issues (Discussed at fewer tables):  

- **Representation in leadership and faculty**: The low diversity in higher-level academic positions and conference participation was noted, impacting the overall inclusivity of the community.  
- **Hybrid conferences**: While hybrid models were seen as more inclusive, concerns were raised about reduced interaction compared to in-person events.  
- **Inclusive program tracks**: Participants suggested diversifying the conference program to cover topics such as non-English and low-resource IR, socio-technical implications of IR systems, and applications relevant to marginalized communities.  
- **Different cultural norms**: Cultural differences affecting participation and engagement were noted, particularly for Asian students. Smaller discussion settings were suggested to ease participation. The SIGIR Virtual Forum might also facilitate this.  
- **Cost of registration**: Concerns were raised about high conference registration fees, particularly for students and attendees from economically disadvantaged regions.  

Additionally, in the online DEI session, Shiri Dori-Hacohen introduced the Disabled in Computing initiative, pointing attention to the presence of invisible disabilities.  

### 2 Reflections and Conclusions  

As SIGIR DEI chairs, Hussein and Suzan will discuss the most important outcomes of the discussion session and conference organization with the SIGIR executive committee. This includes feedback about DEI issues at the conference itself, in particular the lack of inclusivity in food and drinks (sufficient non-alcoholic drinks, non-pork meals, and vegetarian food). One of the main issues for the coming years is the degree to which on-line participation will be possible in worldwide conferences, and how hybrid conferences can be realized successfully. Finally, while SIGIR has actively supported DEI grants, this has had limited impact, but it has become clear that there are dire funding needs of many participants, especially students.  

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3We used ChatGPT to propose an aggregation of the main points from the written reports, then rewrote it in our own words, checking the faithfulness of each point.  
4https://twitter.com/DisabledInCS