

## **ACM SIGIR Annual Business Meeting 2005: Secretary's Notes**

**David D. Lewis**

David D. Lewis Consulting, LLC  
*sigirsec@DavidDLewis.com*

### **1 Opening matters**

The 2005 ACM SIGIR Annual Business Meeting took place on Wednesday, 17 August 2005, at the SIGIR 2005 conference in Salvador, Brazil. All ACM SIGIR Executive Committee members were in attendance: Jamie Callan (Chair), Fabrizio Sebastiani (Vice-Chair), Justin Zobel (Treasurer), and Dave Lewis (Secretary). The current committee 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 Eric Brown (the long-time and now outgoing SIGIR webmaster and information officer), as well as Mounia Lalmas (the incoming SIGIR webmaster and information office), Peter Anick & Ian Ruthven (editors of SIGIR Forum), Christine Borgman (SIGIR liaison to the Joint Conference on Digital Libraries), Gene Golovchinsky (SIGIR liaison to SIGCHI). The SIGIR Awards Chair position, ably handled by Sue Dumais in the past, is currently vacant.

### **2 Reports**

Jamie reviewed finances, indicating that the SIG continues to be financially healthy. (Jamie's Business meeting presentation, as well as the SIGIR 2005 Annual Report, is available at [www.sigir.org](http://www.sigir.org).) However, as usual in recent years, membership dues cover less than half the cost of services that members received. The rest is covered by conference profits (and, sometimes for conferences, external grants). There is a lot of variance in conference profits, and the cost of some services (particularly student travel, and mailing of the yearly paper copy of the SIGIR proceedings to every SIGIR member as a Special Issue of SIGIR Forum) is increasing.

SIGIR is therefore raising dues slightly, from US \$20 to \$30 for basic membership, \$10 to \$15 for student membership, \$3 to \$14 for the air service option for mailing of printed SIGIR Proceedings, and from \$30 to \$45 for the optional printed Proceedings Package. (With the Proceedings Package, a member is mailed paper copies of the JCDL and CIKM proceedings, not just the SIGIR proceedings.)

Jamie observed that even with the price increase, SIGIR will still be losing money on the Proceedings Package (breakeven cost is \$60-65 today). The Package is popular, and potentially attracting members, so we don't want to kill it. The current plan is to increase the cost to breakeven in 2-year stages, encourage migration to the DISC DVD package (see below), and drop the program when/if the number of participants drops below a critical level.

---

### 3 SIGIR Services

Jamie reviewed services SIGIR provides to its members:

- SIGIR Forum: 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 Package: You get SIGIR, CIKM, and JCDL printed proceedings mailed to you. (See discussion above.)
- Optional Digital Symposium Collection (DiSC) Package: A DVD with a large number of database-related proceedings and newsletters. Cost is \$10/year, but it may not be mentioned on your SIGIR or ACM renewal forms: ask for it by name.
- Optional SIGIR CD: 25 Years of SIGIR Proceedings, 1978-2002. This is a great resource, but we have more copies than we need. Possibilities include donating them to universities in developing countries, or making them a new benefit for student members. Jamie is interested in suggestions on how to do either of these, or on other possibilities.
- Student Travel Awards: The amount awarded decreased from \$53,000 for SIGIR 2004 (60% provided by an EU grant) to \$36,350 (from SIGIR) plus 4,700 UK pounds. Jamie thanked BCS-IRSG for the contribution of the 4,700 UK pounds, which came from their SIGIR 2004 profits. A total of 35 students were supported (down from 58 in 2004), of whom 23 came from North America, 15 for Australia/Asia, and 11 from Europe. 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 2005 Best Paper Awards was sponsored by IBM, whom Jamie thanked, and 2005 Best Student Paper Award was sponsored by SIGIR.
- 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 David Harper for his work on the second SIGIR Doctoral Forum, which was run on Monday, 15 August 2005 (the tutorial day) at SIGIR 2005. A group of PhD students was invited, based on applications, to present their dissertation ideas and get feedback from experienced IR researchers and other students. The forum was viewed as successful this year and will be run again next year.

---

## 4 Initiatives, Issues, and Directions

### 4.1. Paper vs. Plastic

The SIGIR conference proceedings are getting larger each year, increasing both printing costs, and the costs to mail a copy to each member as a Special Issue of SIGIR Forum. In 1-3 years dues won't cover this cost, even with the recent increase. Jamie reviewed some of the options including

- Further increases in dues
- Absorbing the losses on memberships
- Stopping mailing of proceedings to members
- Making the SIGIR Forum Special Issue mailed to members a CD/DVD instead of the printed proceedings. (Distribution of printed proceedings to conference attendees would continue.) This could also be combined with an option to get the printed proceedings, perhaps as part of a more expensive SIGIR Proceedings Package.

A suggestion from the floor was to put all SIGIR posters on a CD, allowing us to accept more posters (which was suggested to be good in any case), and reducing the proceedings size. Justin was not sure this would save much expense. Another suggestion was to mail printed proceedings only to SIGIR members that don't attend the conference (with optional duplicate copy to attendees at extra cost). Jamie said that ACM has looked into this and it again wouldn't save much. Several people liked the idea of mailing CD/DVDs instead of printed proceedings. A straw poll of Business Meeting attendees showed strong support for mailing CD/DVD, with only 2 people voting against.

### 4.2 A Victim of Our Success?

Submissions to the SIGIR conference were up 38% this year. The acceptance rate stayed at around 20%, so the proceedings were longer and there were more parallel sessions. There was some debate among attendees as to whether the quality threshold has gone up, despite the acceptance rate staying relatively steady.

The phenomenon of increased submissions is occurring across computer science and ACM as a whole has been looking into this. Several factors seem to be at work: a sheer increase in the number of computer scientists, more publications by graduate students, and more international participation.

Jamie stressed that the issue for SIGIR is to decide what our long-term strategy is for managing this phenomenon. Do we

- Keep a relatively constant number of papers?
- Keep a relatively constant quality threshold?
  - If so, does this mean more parallel sessions? Some accepted papers having posters rather than talks? What about proceedings size?
  - Someone mentioned SIGMOD's experience that using a threshold instead of a count didn't seem to change much.
- Something else?

There was extensive discussion of this issue from the floor. Suggestions/ideas included:

- 
- More different kinds of papers and contributions: demos, late-breaking papers, short papers, etc. Some may not have oral presentations. Possibility of “minute madness” or “boaster sessions” where people briefly talk about their poster.
  - Various strategies to fit more talks into the conference: shorter talks (20 minutes instead of 30), more parallel sessions, putting invited talks in parallel with technical sessions, shorter coffee breaks, longer conference.
  - An issue that came up several times was whether choices among presentation form should be based on technical quality, “naturalness”, author choice, or some other factor. Some work may be best presented as a poster. One could ask people whether they would prefer to present a talk or poster. Some work may be good technically but the speaker is likely to give a poor talk. The possibility of reviewing proposed oral presentation slides was mentioned.
  - Creating even more conferences. CIKM and JCDL have overloads also.
  - The possibility of having a short (or no) paper in physical proceedings for posters, and a longer paper on the conference CD/DVD was discussed. Some attendees mentioned that it was important for posters and demos to have a paper in the proceedings, since this is important for getting travel funding.

There was a straw poll that showed about 3 to 1 against making poster vs. oral presentation decision based on quality, but there was debate about whether the poll had been phrased appropriately, and many people didn't vote.

In any case, no decision was made, and this will certainly be a continuing issue of discussion by the EC and at future Business Meetings.

### **4.3 Term Lengths for SIGIR Officers**

ACM SIGIR currently has 2-year terms for Executive Committee members. The terms can be extended an additional 2 years with the approval of the appropriate SIGIR conference Business Meeting, an option which has, in fact, almost always been used. Many ACM SIGs are simply moving to 3 years terms for EC members, with no (semi-)automatic renewal. There was a bit of discussion on this, but no consensus (and no great amount of interest). The Secretary pointed out that 33% more volunteers would be needed on average.

There was also some discussion on the somewhat separate issue of maintaining continuity as the EC changes. Currently the SIGIR EC maintains continuity informally by including the previous chair in discussions. It was suggested that this be formalized by making “Past President” an official position.

### **4.4 The SIGIR Conference Mentoring Program**

Justin began this topic with a straw poll showed, somewhat discouragingly, that there were about 40 past mentors in the audience but only 5 past mentees.

Justin then reviewed the history of the mentoring program. In 2004 there were 58 mentees, who had a total of 2 papers accepted. In 2005, there were 40 mentees, and 1 paper accepted. (Justin mentioned that in 2005 he weeded out some prospective mentees who were already in high-powered research

---

groups, and others who didn't have a paper yet.) So the mentoring program is not helping with people developing papers good enough to get in.

Justin mentioned on the other hand that there is an outreach benefit in the mentoring program, and about half of past mentors would be willing to do it again. The question is how this compares with other outreach approaches we could take.

There was quite a bit of discussion on this topic. Some suggestions/comments that came up:

- Having a ruthless mentoring chair who makes sure both mentees and mentors are appropriate for the program.
- Having a "rejection counseling service" (!) instead of a mentoring program. The thought is that going over reviews with someone is more useful than mentoring.
- It was suggested that 10 minutes work by a mentor might stop someone from submitting a paper that clearly isn't ready, and thus save reviewers a lot of work.
- The question was raised of whether there's other benefits we aren't measuring, e.g. in journal papers or papers at other conferences.

There was a straw poll on whether the mentoring program should continue. Very few people voted: about 10 in favor of continuing current program, 5 against this.

#### **4.5 Historical IR Documents**

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. Dave Lewis is the SIGIR EC representative to this effort, and will be conducting a survey on what materials should be included in such a collection.

#### **4.6 Misc.**

Attendees were reminded of the many fine journals in information retrieval, including *ACM Transactions on Information Systems*, *Information Processing and Management*, *Information Retrieval*, and *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*. Josiane Mothe mentioned Information Retrieval currently has a short publication queue. In the context of discussing journals, your Secretary sparked a brief discussion about the need for attention to detail in using the term "open access".

### **5 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. See [www.sigir.org](http://www.sigir.org) for details on upcoming conferences.

Mark Sanderson reviewed the SIGIR 2004 conference. There were 459 attendees, a record for Europe. Since breakeven was set at 250 attendees, there was a profit of 60,000 pounds or US \$108,604. Profits went approximately 18% to ACM, 32% to ACM/SIGIR, 25% to BCS, and 25% to BCS-IRSG. About 2/3rds of the IRSG money went to a SIGIR student travel fund. Mark presented his argument that the money going to BCS was a good cause.

---

Ricardo Baeza-Yates went over preliminary data on SIGIR 2005, which looks to be successful. Attendees applauded the organizers.

Efthimis Efthimiadis reviewed preparations for SIGIR 2006, the 29th Annual International ACM SIGIR Conference, which will be held on the University of Washington campus in Seattle, WA, USA, from 6 to 11 August, 2006. He encouraged papers, attendees, and corporate sponsors.

Arjen DeVries and Wessel Kraaij made a brief presentation on SIGIR 2007, including unveiling a, well let us say, “eyecatching”, De Stijl style logo and color scheme. The conference will be held from 23 to 27 July, 2007 at the grand hotel Krasnapolsky, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Jamie mentioned that the SIGIR EC has selected Singapore to be the site of SIGIR in 2008.

There were three presentations by groups proposing North American locations for SIGIR 2009. Dave Grossman made the presentation for the Chicago, IL proposal; Doug Oard for the Maryland/Washington, DC proposal; and James Allan for the Boston, MA proposal. The SIGIR EC (minus the Secretary, who is part of the Chicago group) will be reviewing these proposals, and any others received by the Chair, this fall.

As time was running out, Jamie finished by quickly reviewing co-sponsored conferences.