

---

## FROM THE CHAIR...

---

Greetings,

I thought I'd report back on the annual ACM SIG Governing Board Meeting, which I attended on March 27<sup>th</sup> in Chicago. Referred to as the SGB, this group is comprised of the chairs of the Association's 34 Special Interest Groups (SIGs), the Executive Committee of the SGB (of which our former chair, Jamie Callan, is a member), and a few of the high-ranking elected representatives of ACM. The SGB has overall responsibility for the health and continuation of the Association's 34 SIGs. It's quite impressive to consider the range of research and application areas covered within ACM when you hear each of the Chairs introduce themselves and their SIG. Much of the discussion at the meeting is around common issues such as membership, conferences, and financial health of the SIGs and the parent Association.

It is interesting to note a continuing pattern in ACM and the SIGs, namely, that while there are currently 93,000 ACM Members, there are only 42,000 SIG members. SIGIR, as all other SIGs, is eager to increase its own membership and over time has attempted various methods. While there are hundreds of long-time SIGIR members, we, as other SIGs, have a history of losing SIG members if they do not attend the annual conference. We give free SIG membership to first-time SIGIR Conference attendees, but if these new members don't attend the next SIGIR Conference, they do not elect to renew their SIGIR membership, although they may very well renew their ACM membership. None of the SIGs have come up with a solution that succeeds. Any thoughts you might have on approaches to resolve this phenomenon would be welcome.

In term of finances for ACM, fiscal year '09 will prove to be a solid year, but not as good as fiscal year '08. This is due in part because SIG Conferences will, in aggregate, make money this year, but less than last year as revenues will not go up much, while expenses will. At the same time, the SIGs, and definitely SIGIR, continue to benefit from the \$2 million distribution to the SIGs from Digital Library downloads. In fact, SIGIR currently makes more from Digital Library downloads than it does from membership fees.

Given the economic climate, a main topic of the SGB Meeting was the impact of the current economic situation on this year's SIG Conferences. ACM leadership, which is the top level responsible entity for 170 conferences a year, does not believe there is a crisis, but rather that SIGs need to watch expenses, and especially to review hotel contracts, to see if better deals might be available if the expected conference attendance does not materialize. Our 2009 SIGIR Conference Chairs are working hard to ensure that our conference is as profitable as it might be. We strongly encourage all of our members to attend what will be an excellent conference in a beautiful, historic city, with lively arts and entertainment offerings, in addition to an exceptional technical program.

In other SIG-wide initiatives, there is a focus on a greater internationalization of ACM, particularly in India and China, where IEEE is a more prominent organization. Strategies include building in-country leadership groups, with SIG chapters in each country. ACM will step up and support financially, and is encouraging SIGs to hold conferences in these countries, particularly in India. Given that SIGIR '08 was held in Singapore and SIGIR '11 will be held in Beijing, we are obviously ahead of the wave.

Moving to other topics, I hope to see many of you at SIGIR '09 in Boston – please check out the papers, posters, workshops, tutorials, demos, and Industry Day that you can attend, as well as anticipate the tri-

---

---

annual, yet-to-be-revealed Salton Award, whose winner will be announced at the Welcome Reception on Sunday, July 19<sup>th</sup>, followed by the Salton Lecture on Monday.

The Business Meeting, with box lunches, will be held on Wednesday, and will follow the format introduced at last year's conference, wherein a good portion of the meeting is devoted to topics that members suggest to the DISCUSS listserv for consideration by members. This list will again be activated, and elicit ideas from members that they would like openly discussed at the Business Meeting, especially those that may further advance SIGIR as the premier organization of our field, and improve on support of our members. The outcomes of these discussions will serve as recommendations to the Executive Committee, or may be brought back to the Business Meeting the next year for further consideration.

Until July,

Liz Liddy

Chair, SIGIR

---