
FROM THE CHAIR...

As the prestige and prominence of our field increases and broadens, I think it wise for SIGIR as an organization to think of what we might do to insure that we maintain the position of influence that we have earned and now hold. As those of you who are regular SIGIR Conference paper submitters know very well, the acceptance rate of papers at our annual conference is quite low (i. e. competitive), being 16% in the last two years.

While this can be viewed very positively as an indication that SIGIR is the field's premier, signature professional conference, we as an ACM SIG need to consider whether the relative exclusivity of SIGIR Conference acceptance is also having a negative effect on SIGIR. The issue is whether the fact that many excellent, submitted papers that are not making it into SIGIR, but are then being accepted and presented quite credibly at other conferences that have sprung up (e.g. CIKM), is an indication that SIGIR ought to consider hosting another (or more than one other) conference a year? Or perhaps we should consider whether to increase the number of parallel sessions, or perhaps the length of the conference itself.

And why should we consider these options? This is partially due to the risk we take that the many researchers whose papers or posters aren't accepted at SIGIR, but which are favorably-reviewed and well-received at other conferences, might lose their loyalty to SIGIR, and in fact bypass SIGIR submission, participation, and attendance, in preference to a new loyalty to a conference which is still stringent in its quality monitoring, but which has been more inventive in ways to be more inclusive and accepting of all the high quality papers which are deserving of acceptance.

In the past, SIGIR has shown such openness to change when it altered its original meeting format of only one session at a time (i. e. no parallel sessions), and no poster session – to today's format where there are typically 2 or 3 concurrent sessions, and an excellent poster session. Now, oughtn't we consider some inventive ways we could devise to broaden the participation rate at a time when we know that our academic and commercial research, and the students we are graduating are more highly valued than at any other time? Shouldn't we consider the risks of not broadening participation? While our conference is currently the one at which the richest professional exchanges occur and the one at which the best employment opportunities for our PhD students exist, can we be assured this favorable situation will continue, without expanding the opportunities for participation?

For example, many individuals who attended last year's Poster Session acknowledged that the quality of the posters was better than the papers presented at many other conferences. While this is estimable, don't we take the risk that such high-quality poster presenters will themselves recognize this, and rather than submit a poster to SIGIR, write this work up as a paper to submit to a competitive conference, where they know they will have a better chance of being accepted as a paper than they do of being accepted as a poster at SIGIR?

While I am stepping down now as Chair of SIGIR, I will encourage the incoming Executive Committee to lead the membership in a consideration of this proposal that SIGIR explore ideas that will expand the inclusiveness of SIGIR, such as adding a mid-year conference, or two nights of poster sessions, or increasing the number of parallel sessions, or extending the conference by a day – or any other inventive means that would ensure that SIGIR continues to reign as the preferred professional conference for ALL high-quality IR research.
