
FROM THE CHAIR

Greetings SIGIR members and friends,

This issue of *SIGIR Forum* contains an abundance of information about the future of SIGIR, including a report from the organizers of the third Strategic Workshop on Information Retrieval in Lorne (SWIRL), which sets an agenda for the next few years of IR research, as well as reports describing the SIGIR Community Member Survey that was conducted earlier this year about preprints and ACM artifact review and badging.

Since our annual conference last year in Tokyo, the SIGIR Executive Committee and volunteers have continued efforts to grow the community. Many of our efforts have focused on cultivating new members, including students, and addressing diversity and inclusion:

- Over the years, our student travel grant program has helped thousands of students attend SIGIR, CHIIR, ICTIR, CIKM, JCDL and WSDM.
- The *SIGIR Student Lunch* and *SIGIR Student Party* have been going strong for several years, and create opportunities for students to get to know one another as well as senior members of SIGIR.
- The *SIGIR Student Affairs Chair*, Laura Dietz, introduced the *SIGIR Student Liaison Program*, which creates leadership roles for students within SIGIR.
- The *Friends of SIGIR* program supports geographically disperse IR-related events.
- Two new chapters of SIGIR have been created: *SIGIR Tokyo* and *SIGIR China*. We are grateful to the teams who founded these chapters as we believe they will increase impact and reach, and also international membership.
- At last year's SIGIR conference, we held the inaugural *Diversity and Inclusion Lunch*. The purpose of this new annual event is to provide an open forum for the SIGIR community to explore and discuss diversity and inclusion, and to help set an agenda for future activities and initiatives.
- We co-sponsored the *CRA-W Grad Cohort Workshop*, which we have done for several years, to connect with female computing students and promote SIGIR.
- We identified a way to lower conference registration fees while maintaining fiscal responsibility. Conference fees for SIGIR, ICTIR and CHIIR were between \$500-600 USD in the past year, which is much less expensive than peer conferences. Our hope is these lower fees will allow more people to attend these conferences, especially those who do not have large travel budgets.
- This year's SIGIR Conference organizers experimented with a new track structure in an effort to attract more submissions and increase conference participation.
- Finally, at this year's SIGIR Conference, we will announce a new event in collaboration with SIGKDD to address geographic diversity and inclusion. This event arose, in part, from ideas generated at last year's *Diversity and Inclusion Lunch*.

Thus, many efforts are being made on many fronts to increase membership and participation in SIGIR. Recently, ACM made available data showing the current membership of all SIGs, as well as the breakdown of those who identify as "male," "female," or who declined to categorize themselves using one of these labels (Figure 1). This membership snapshot was taken in March 2018. As Figure 1 shows, SIGGRAPH, is the biggest SIG, with 7,209 members, while SIGDOC is the smallest with 126. The median number of members is 418. It is important to note that not all members of ACM

are associated with SIGs, so one should not infer that Figure 1 represents all ACM membership. It is also the case that one person can belong to multiple SIGs.

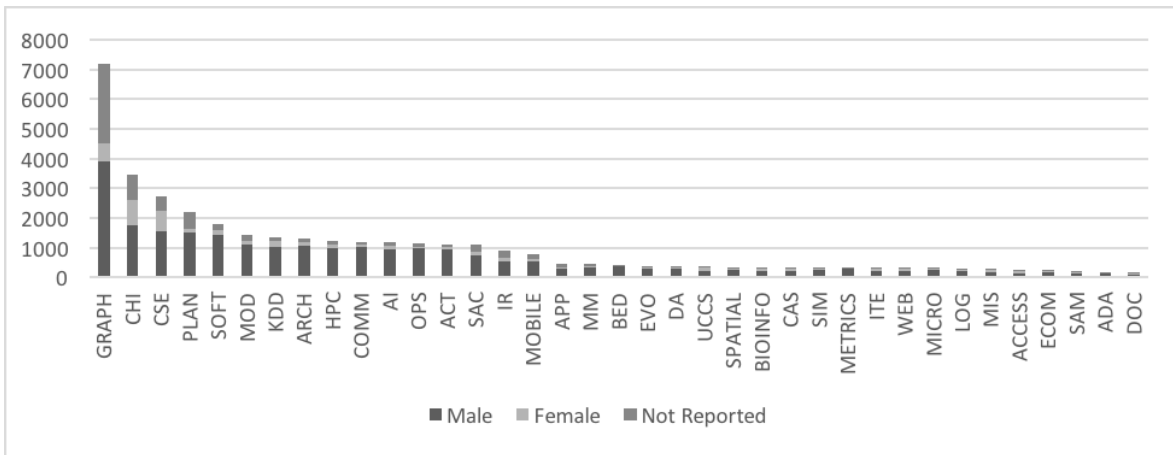


Figure 1: ACM SIG membership as of March 2018.

To better examine the data in the middle of the distribution, Figure 2 focuses on SIGs with membership numbers that are between 400 and 1,800. SIGIR has 881 members; 551 of these members describe themselves as “Male,” while 113 describe themselves as “Female.” Two-hundred seventeen did not provide an answer. SIGKDD, one of our closest peers, has 1,339 members, while SIGWEB has 294.

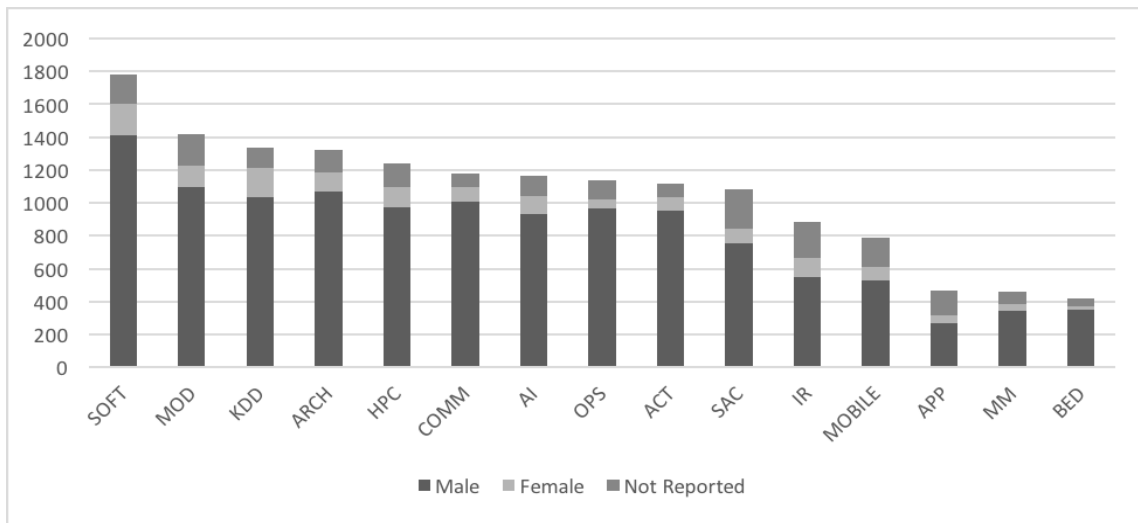


Figure 2. Membership of ACM SIGs with 400 to 1,800 members.

As these figures show, the overwhelming majority of SIG members identify as male. Of the 36,418 (non-unique) members represented, only 13% identified as female. Figure 3 shows the SIGs organized according to percentage of female members. Thirteen percent of SIGIR members identified as female, which is slightly above the median for all SIGs (10%). Some of our closest peer SIGs have similar percentages of self-identified females (KDD: 14%; WEB: 15%). SIGs with the greatest percentages of self-identified females are DOC (39%), ACCESS (37%) and UCCS (35%). These SIGs are on the smaller-side with respect to overall membership numbers: 126, 228 and 359,

respectively. CSE and CHI are the largest SIGs at the front-end of the figure with 2724 and 3471 members, respectively, and 25% of members identifying as female. The SIG with the smallest percentage of self-identified females is SIGADA, which has 166 members (3% self-identified females).

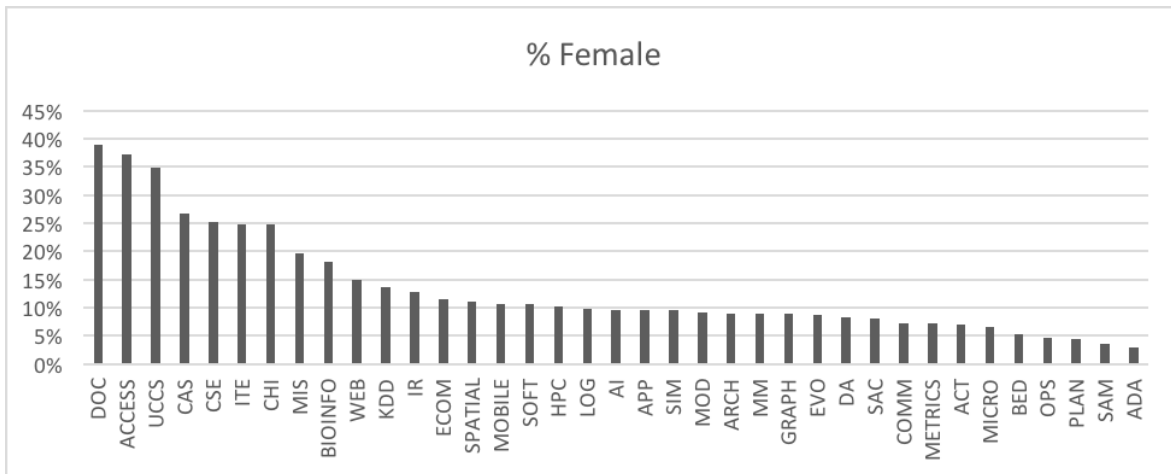


Figure 3: ACM SIGs organized according to percent of members identifying as female.

What can we conclude from these figures? Our conclusions will likely be based on answers to other questions: How big do we want SIGIR to be? How big can we expect it to be? Is 13% female membership good or bad? What should this value be? From my perspective, I think we can, and should, do much better with respect to female participation in SIGIR. I also think we can do better with overall membership.

These figures do not show representation across other diversity characteristics such as geography and race. We are in the process of gathering historical data from the ACM about SIGIR membership as well as other related SIGs to better understand membership and conference participation trends, as well as membership diversity. Such data are useful if we want to understand whether SIGIR has grown or shrank, and whether our programming, including that which is intended to increase diversity, is effective.

In the meantime, if you are a member of SIGIR, thank you for making all the programming described earlier in this letter possible. And, if you are not a member of SIGIR, please join. We encourage you to not just think about what being a member of SIGIR or ACM can do for you, but to think about how your membership helps others, and maintains the strength of the IR community. What can be accomplished when we are part of a professional community is much greater than what we can accomplish on our own.

Please feel free to send us any issues you'd like us to consider, or any feedback you have about our initiatives and accomplishments. We hope to see you at this year's SIGIR Conference in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

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