ACM SIGIR Annual Business Meeting 2008: Secretary's Notes

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I. Opening Matters

The 2008 ACM SIGIR Annual Business Meeting took place on Wednesday, 23 July 2008, at the SIGIR 2008 conference in Singapore. The meeting was led by the ACM SIGIR Chair, Liz Liddy. The Vice-Chair (Mounia Lalmas) and Treasurer (Alistair Moffat) were also in attendance. The Secretary, Dave Lewis, could not attend, but the Vice-Chair, along with Brian Davison of Lehigh University, volunteered to take notes. *(Secretary's Note: Thanks!).* Under the new bylaws approved last year, the current Executive Committee (EC) members will serve a single three year term (July 1, 2007 – June 30, 2009) without option for renewal.

Liz began by thanking various SIGIR volunteers and advisors: Tetsuya Sakai (Asian Regional Representative), Djoerd Hiemstra (Information Officer), Raman Chandrasekar (SIG-IRList editor), Diane Kelly and Ian Ruthven (SIGIR Forum editors), Edie Rasmussen (SIGIR liaison to the Joint Conference on Digital Libraries), and Alistair Moffat (SIGIR Awards Chair).

Speaking of awards, Liz, on behalf of the EC and all of SIGIR, congratulated two SIGIR members who were recently named ACM Fellows: Andrei Broder (Yahoo! Research) and Rajeev Motwani (Stanford University).

II. Reports

Liz began by reviewing the goals of the EC (ensuring the quality of SIGIR, meeting the needs of its members, maintaining financial stability, and representing SIGIR within ACM). On the second point, Liz reviewed services SIGIR provides to its members:

SIGIR Forum (paper and online): 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 and DiSC Packages. Liz again stressed the great value of the DiSC Package (US $10 for DVD proceedings of a range of database and IR-related conferences).   The DiSC

Package may not be mentioned on your ACM/SIGIR renewal materials, but you may write it in by name.

Optional SIGIR CD: 25 Years of SIGIR Proceedings, 1978-2002.

The SIG-IRList newsletter. *(Secretary's Note: And the SIGIR-ANNOUNCE email list for notifications from the SIGIR information officer.)*

SIGIR also sponsors several awards:

- Salton Award: This ACM SIGIR award honors those who have made "*... significant, sustained and continuing contributions to research in information retrieval*". It is awarded triennially at the SIGIR Conference, and 2009 is a Salton year. The selection committee consists of those past Salton Award winners who are available to participate. The SIGIR Chair coordinates discussion and nominations, so please contact Liz with your nominations and comments.
- Best Paper and Best Student Paper Awards: ACM 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 2008 Best Paper and Best Student Paper Awards were sponsored by IBM, whom Liz thanked.
- Student Travel Awards: ACM SIGIR makes awards to aid travel by students to the SIGIR conference. The amount awarded in 2008 was approximately US $50K. A total of 54 students were supported. Liz expressed thanks for contributions to SIGIR student travel by Google (for Doctoral Consortium participants), Microsoft Research (in honor of Karen Sparck Jones), and Amit Singhal (in honor of Don Crouch). *(Secretary's Note: Information on SIGIR Student Travel awards is made available to authors of accepted papers, posters, and demos for each SIGIR Conference.)*

Alistair then discussed SIGIR membership, which showed a substantial decline from 2007 (1547 members) to 2008 (1138 members). This resulted from memberships expiring for many new members who were automatically enrolled at SIGIR 2006, and from SIGIR 2007 having a smaller proportion of non-members attending (and becoming members). We have a stable base of about 850 Professional Memberships, but need to improve conversion from Associate to Professional Memberships.

Alistair then reviewed finances, showing the SIGIR bank balance had increased from US US $610K to US $802K from 2007 to 2008, due to the successful Amsterdam conference, as well as increased SIGIR-related downloads from the ACM Digital Library. As mentioned last year, we are now receiving more income from the Digital Library than from membership dues. As mentioned, we spent roughly US $50K on student travel, but the question was raised of what else that funds should be spent on, given the likely profitability of next year's conference in Boston.

III. Conferences

Liz 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.

SIGIR 2007 was briefly reviewed. It was the largest SIGIR yet in the Europe/Africa region. There were approximately 700 attendees (599 main conference registrations, 363 tutorial registrations, 292 workshop registrations, and approximately 100 industry even registrations). Thirty-eight countries were represented   After the ACM service fee of EUR 48,515, a profit of EUR 50,497 was returned to ACM SIGIR.

Tat-Seng Chua (National University of Singapore) gave the preliminary figures on SIGIR 2008, our very successful first conference in Asia: 543 main conference registrants, 465 tutorial registrants, and 289 workshop registrants, for a total of 576 unique registrants. The general chairs, Tat-Seng Chua and Mun-Kew Leong (National Library Board, Singapore) were congratulated.

Jay Aslam (Northeastern University) gave the presentation on SIGIR 2009, which will occur 19-23 July, 2009 in Boston, Massachusetts, USA.   The conference will be held at the Sheraton Boston Hotel with tutorials and workshops at Northeastern University. The general chairs are Jay, along with James Allan (U. Mass Amherst).

Fabio Crestani (University of Lugano) briefly discussed SIGIR 2010, which will be held 18-23 July, 2010 in Geneva, Switzerland. He extolled the beauty of the region. The General Chairs are Stephane Marchand-Maillet (University of Geneva) and Fabio.

Liz announced that there had been two bids for SIGIR 2011 - Haifa, Israel and Beijing, China – and that the EC had selected Beijing. The general chairs will be Jian-Yun Nie (Univ. of Montreal) and Wei-Ying Ma (Microsoft Research Asia). Jian-Yun Nie spoke about the conference and the attractions of Beijing.

On the usual rotation schedule, SIGIR 2012 will be in the Americas. No bids had been received yet, and Liz encouraged members to consider hosting SIGIR 2012 in their area. It is a large project, but ACM and the SIGIR EC provide a lot of support, and it's a great way to bring attention to your institution and area.

SIGIR-sponsored and in-cooperation conferences discussed included CIKM 2008, HLT 2009 and JCDL 2009. See *HYPERLINK "http://www.sigir.org" www.sigir.org* for details on upcoming conferences.

VI. Floor Discussions of Important Issues

As discussed in Liz's "From the Chair…" article, the EC's goal for the 2008 Business Meeting (and future ones) was to increase the time devoted to discussions from the floor of important issues. To that end, the EC polled the membership through an email discussion list for important topics for discussion. Six topics were selected for discussion, and Liz presented brief summaries of each of them. This process was successful in eliciting extensive discussion from the floor.

We include below each of the propositions posed, and then a summary of the notes taken by Mounia and Brian on each of the topics.

Item 1. *"Explore new ways of building on strengths of company research & academic research"*

The first topic was the perennial one of how to bring together the strengths of industrial and academic research in new ways.

The discussion started with the idea of an Industry Day at the SIGIR conference. The organizers of SIGIR 2007 and other persons reported on the running of the Industry Day held at SIGIR 2007 in parallel to the workshops.

About 100 to 150 people attended the event, which consisted of invited presentations from speakers from industry. The event was completely self-funded (this meant that there were no registration fees).

The attendees were by invitation only, and there were presentations from big search engine companies as well as local companies. It was viewed important to have attendees from large companies so as to attract smaller companies to attend. The event attracted 50 people that would not have attended SIGIR otherwise.

The talks were more application-oriented than what is usually presented at SIGIR. It was made clear that the talks should remain technical and limit advertising/sale talk.

It was also noted that free registration did not work out well, as about 40 people who signed up did not show up.

Because of logistic reasons, the Industry Day could not be run in the same venue as the conference. This meant that at the end there was not much crossover between workshops and the industry event as desired.

It was also recommended to keep such an event focused, for example, by selecting the speakers.

It was also noted that other conferences have industry vs. academic tracks e.g. in parallel (e.g., CIKM does this but there are fewer industry papers than academic/research papers; note that CIKM 2008 is organizing a separate industry event).

An industry day could also be used as a doctoral hiring/recruiting forum.

Liz ended the discussion by stating that it is not just people that do search, but companies have also search problems, e.g. finance industry, real estate industry, and they all need solutions that we can provide.

Item 2. "Changing SIGIR Reviewing Process"

The second topic, and the one on which the EC and others had done the most advance work, was the question of how to update the reviewing process for SIGIR submissions. Traditionally SIGIR has had a physical program committee meeting at which a group (variously called the "program committee", "area chairs", or "senior program committee") has gone over reviews of papers (typically 3 per paper) to select which ones will be presented at the conference. In recent years this process has also involved senior program committee members writing meta-reviews to summarize the reviews of each paper. As the number of papers submitted has grown to almost 500, on top of the need to make decisions about tutorials, workshops, posters, and demos, this process has become increasingly unmanageable. The

cost, and carbon footprint implications, of a physical program committee meeting have also come under increasing question.

Discussions among the EC, past program chairs, and the SIGIR 2009 program chairs, led to a proposed new process with two major characteristics:

- Decisions on acceptance of papers would be made by area chairs, in consultation with other area chairs and the program chairs. The seeking of additional reviews in the case of disputed papers (something which has long been done informally) would be encouraged.
- The program committee would be online instead of in-person.

Most of the discussion was around how to carry out an online PC meeting. There was a proposal of a 12 day timing. There was a question regarding the use of real-time communication software (several persons mentioned that good tools existed for doing this). At this stage, no exact procedure has been decided upon, e.g. e-mail exchange, small discussion list, videoconference for small groups, etc.

The possibility of local meetings for sub-groups was also raised (ACM Multimedia is doing it this year, and SIGIR 1990 did it). Two concerns were raised: area chairs pushing papers in their own areas, and quotas per region/area.

Other issues discussed regarding the online PC meeting included the followings:
- We may get different people acting as meta-reviewer/area chair/senior PC (until now it was a requirement to travel to the PC meeting), which is good.
- The time difference is an issue for both online and face-to-face PC meetings.
- Finally, the value of being a senior PC member was raised. It is partly to get to meet with people within one's own area? If you take away the meeting, do we lose the value?

Item 3. "Inclusivity of Opportunity"

SIGIR members have made a variety of calls for SIGIR to be more inclusive of members who can only attend when in their part of the world, of IR people from underrepresented areas of the world (Africa, Russia, South America, etc.), of students, of members earlier in their careers, and others. Suggestions in the email discussion included an online professional community, putting papers online prior to the conference to improve understanding by new attendees, and making available video of conference presentations. A variety of other ideas came up in the floor discussion:

- It is important to provide affordable accommodation for students.
- The organizers of SIGIR 2008 worked at identifying IR people in Asia, for example in India and China. There was no mass e-mailing, but instead targeted e-mailing. No publicity to those that would attend was really made for SIGIR 2008.
- Having student sessions (this is done by other conferences).
- Tutorial notes can be put on the web (this may bring revenue to ACM SIGIR).
- Putting videos of the talks online (WSDM did this) but only if the videos add values (e.g. imagine a bad talk given by you!).
- Any affirmative action is fine, as long as it does not harm the conference.
- Get younger people to become involved, who will think creatively, and do something in parallel.

Item 4. *"How to Include Innovative Work?"*

The perennial question of how to ensure both high quality and openness to innovative work (which may not use standard evaluation methods and data) was discussed. Posters use to enable this, but have become more paper-like. Are workshops accomplishing this, or are they also too conservative? Do we need short papers, minute madness/boaster sessions, what?

It was commented that the PC committee should be looking for papers with innovation. The idea of a parallel session for presenting risky work and work with not much evaluation was put forward. Also the possibility of a session to discuss negative results was mentioned.

It was also stressed that having to recognize innovative papers is not that easy. All proposed inputs will be looked into by the organizers of SIGIR 2009, e.g. a crazy idea session, but we also need more suggestions about how to run such a session, as to not hurt the conference.

Item 5. *"Reviewing Process"*

In an item related to Items 2 and 4, the question of improving the quality of reviewing for SIGIR was discussed. Ideas contributed on the email list include shortening the reviewing cycle, allowing author rebuttals, training reviewers, seeking more intellectually diverse reviewers, and reviewing reviews. More ideas emerged in the discussion:

- Freshness of papers: The full-six month long cycle is maybe too long. It was however pointed out that shortening this cycle would mean an even bigger role from senior PC/area chair/meta-reviewer. It is believed that six months is indeed needed, and maybe more with an online PC meeting. Workshop proposal notifications should however be sent earlier.
- We must review the reviewers. We need to weed out for non responsive and irresponsible reviewers. Other conferences recognize outstanding reviewers.
- It was suggested to not have a paper bidding stage, as it does not bring much (and thus may actually be a waste of time).
- People have no idea of the search issues in developing countries, thus reviews of papers on these issues often miss the point.
- Should we pay people to do reviews?

Item 6. *"Expansion of Topics in SIGIR CFP"*

There was no floor discussion of this topic, but members were encouraged to contact the program chair with suggestions.