**ANNUAL REPORT**

of the Distinguished Speakers Program Committee

For the Period: July 1, 2018 - June 30, 2019

Submitted by: Outgoing Chair Andrew Conklin

1. BASIC INFORMATION

1.1 Our committee members span several countries and bring expanded diversity over prior years. We have improved in domains of expertise, gender perspective, program representation in geographical hotspots, and practitioner input. The entire committee has transitioned to all new faces since March of 2017, including 4 confirmed in the past year, with a by product being a younger peer group.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Member: | Appointment: | Research or Practice? | Topic Referee of: |
| Andrew Conklin (outgoing Chair, DC) | 3/2017 | Practice | * Information Systems, Search, Information Retrieval, Database Systems, Data Mining, Data Science
* Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Computer Vision, Natural language processing
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| Gavin Doherty (Ireland) | 5/2017 | Research | * Human Computer Interaction
* Graphics, Computer Aided Design
* Architecture, Embedded Systems and Electronics, Robotics
 |
| Valerie Woolard(DC) | 6/2017 | Practice | * Society and the Computing Profession
* Web, Mobile and Multimedia Technologies
* Human Computer Interaction
* Software Engineering and Programming
 |
| Todd Chapin(Boston) | 6/2017 | Practice | * Human Computer Interaction
* Web, Mobile, and Multimedia Technologies
* Security and Privacy
* Hardware, Power and Energy
 |
| Alexandre Renteria(Brazil) | 9/2017 | Practice | * Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Computer Vision, Natural language processing
* Information Systems, Search, Information Retrieval, Database Systems, Data Mining, Data Science
* Web, Mobile and Multimedia Technologies
* Networks and Communications
 |
| Srinivas Padmanabhuni(India) | 7/2018 | Research | * Computational theory, Algorithms, and Mathematics
* Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Computer Vision, Natural language processing
* Security and Privacy
* Networks and Communications
 |
| Faez Ahmed(NYC) | 7/2018 | Research | * Architecture, Embedded Systems and Electronics, Robotics
* Information Systems, Search, Information Retrieval, Database Systems, Data Mining, Data Science
* Applied Computing
* Hardware, Power and Energy
 |
| Jess Bell(incoming Chair, Santa Cruz) | 7/2018 | Practice | * Society and the Computing Profession
* Web, Mobile and Multimedia Technologies,
* Graphics, Computer Aided Design
 |
| Upasna Madhok(SF) | 12/2018 | Practice | * Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Computer Vision, Natural language processing
* Computational theory, Algorithms, and Mathematics
* Applied Computing
* Software Engineering and Programming
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1.2 Purpose:

To bring distinguished speakers from academia, industry, and government to give presentations to ACM chapters, members, and the greater tech community in a variety of venues and formats.

1.3 List dates of committee meetings.

We hold conference calls for 40 minutes about 6 times a year. We have typically held them on Friday mornings at 11am Eastern Time.

2. PROJECT SUMMARY

Operations.

We had a stronger year in comparison to prior years. Although we have a lecture given in 41 countries, India was the clear hotspot with 47 lectures, followed by the US with 31, and the EU with 28. All others were single digits. Out of all the categories that organizer requests come from, “Chapters” and “University Group - non-chapter” increased. Additionally, our per-event cost went up marginally, but within a normal range compared to prior fiscal years. This increase is likely due to a major spike in tour requests. Below is a table comparing our last few fiscal years.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **FY** | **Lectures** | **RSVPs** | **Expenses** | **Avg Cost / Lecture** | **Avg RSVP / Lecture** |
| 2019 | 150 | 33,398 | $109,949.00 | $732 | 222 |
| 2018 | 138 | 24,740 | $84,562.38 | $612 | 179 |
| 2017 | 93 | 22,631 | $74,777.00 | $803 | 243 |
| 2016 | 96 | 21,020 | $68,759.00 | $716 | 218 |
| 2015 | 79 | 11,110 | $45,007.18 | $569 | 140 |
| 2014 | 71 | 17,919 | $65,908.19 | $928 | 252 |
| 2013 | 100 | 17,330 | $78,945.40 | $789 | 173 |

Projects.

#1 - Completed - Data cleaning for lectures. It was impossible to determine the most popularly requested topics because of over-assignment on topic tags with lecture abstracts. This effort was to review and manually retag lectures so that future analysis would be clearer. We praise committee member Jessica Bell for taking this on.

#2 - Canceled - $5k budget for rebranding experimentation. This was for non-profit contractor expertise in stakeholder research, vision brainstorming, design & graphics expertise to produce visual deliverables as we experiment, learn, and rebrand the DSP. The goal was to have a program concept that appeals to thought leading practitioners from startup to enterprise. Unfortunately, this budget was approved but then retracted by the Practitioner’s Board before we could execute.

#3 - Completed - Timely informational updates before committee calls. This push was to shape up structured, timely, and highly relevant information to committee members before our scheduled conference call. The focus was on speakers approved to the DSP, lectures given recently, and hotspots of upcoming lectures around the globe, including those near committee members. This effort was aimed at increasing engagement with the committee, and was effective for better conference calls. It did not solve for our desire to increase engagement over a sustained period of time with the committee. This effort was highly valued and appreciated as the conference call discussions with members improved.

#4 - Completed - Introducing new control concepts on Conferences. We went over budget with high lecture demand compared to the prior year, and we were advised to try out a conference request review process with volunteers on our committee. We instituted a conference review sub-committee of three people, in response to the urgency of handling all new requests at once, without necessarily having a proven automated process in place. This allowed us to try things out, make adjustments, brainstorm improvements, and execute on reviews at the same time. We have vetted our evaluation questions for volunteers to give a yay/nay, and it's ready to move into an automated process with our full committee, where each member reviews speaker nominees and lecture requests in their areas of technical topic interest and expertise.

3. PLANS

Overview.

Our efforts in the coming year will be focused on codifying and automating our lecture request review process for the full committee. Also, to continue to improve the program’s User Experience and Communications outreach.

Projects.

Planned - Review policies and improve Program User Experience. We want to continue our trend of removing frustrations and getting events planned more quickly and painlessly. We also want to be smarter about being more impactful with the budget we have. This could include pre-recorded video lectures with a live conference call Q&A. It could also include allowing more speaker requests if the organizing entity is willing to pick up all costs.

Planned - Codify and automate the topic referee review process. We have a new process for reviewing lecture requests from conferences that we want to roll out to all our committee members, who serve as topic referees. Although we are introducing new restrictions in the lecture requests, we have also leveraged this opportunity to get to know the organizing conference organizers better so that we support the best ones based on our values of reputation, impact, and diversity.

Diversity.

In the past year, we have worked in the direction of gender balance on the committee, with three women serving out of 9 total members, and one as our incoming Chair. This is an increase over prior years. We are also now reviewing conferences with an eye for diversity, which is starting to showcase to organizers that plan conferences, that we are interested in their decisions around this subject in our review process.

4. COMMENTS

In my 2.5 year timeframe as the Chair of the DSP Committee, I’ve been impressed and humbled in a number of ways while serving for this program. 1) I’ve been impressed by how hard staff works for us. They are professional, supportive, collaborative, and deliver on items they commit to doing. In our capacity, it's not always clear when we ask for something initially, if it is an unreasonable amount of effort, a reasonable amount of effort, a quick action item, or if we are simply asking for something that wouldn’t actually improve the program. Staff communication and experience has helped tremendously to negotiate practical outcomes for the betterment of the program. 2) Conversely, it is difficult getting data, deriving insights, and becoming more informed for strategy discussions, compared to my commercial experiences in my profession applying my computer/data science knowledge. If we want to look at data the same way as the year before, then we have a pre-existing process for that. If we want to enable volunteers and staff to have discussions that are conducive to learning from program system data, negotiating possible improvements, and evaluating those improvements after they are rolled out; access to existing system reports, but also raw, real-time, read only, program system data through a login would be a potential starting point for that possibility. 3) I’ve been humbled by how global ACM activities impact our program. This was not easy to see at first. India has an assertive and strong operation that I was not familiar with, and this year I began to understand how that operation has impacted our program numbers, increasingly over the past few years. Future committee members would become effective more quickly, if data trends were provided about the global organization’s top initiatives and pre-existing operations, along with the ability to directly access program system data in real-time. I’ve learned a lot about the organization during this stretch, and I’m very optimistic for this program in the hands of our new Chair, Jessica Bell.