

Highlights from the Student Community

By Lauren Miller

As the current IEEE Robotics and Automation Society (RAS) Student Activities Committee (SAC) embarks on the second year of our term, we would like to share some highlights from the student community. It has been an exciting year, and SAC Cochairs Jory Denny, Arash Ajoudani, Pat Wensing, and I have had a chance to meet many members of the RAS student body. We have loved working with all of you and are looking forward to another great year.

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The SAC, formed to represent student interests in Society planning and decision making, has been working on several initiatives to ensure that our student members are getting the greatest benefit from their membership.

Ongoing projects include logo design and video competitions, various events for students associated with conferences, and new volunteer opportunities. A new project that we are particularly excited about is the upcoming launch of the Young Reviewer Program (YRP), which will pair students with mentors to develop reviewing skills (see “YRP:

Toward the Improvement of Peer Review Skills for RAS Students”). Read on for more information about this program as well as other recent SAC projects and events.

As always, please stay in touch and let us know if you have any ideas or suggestions.

- 1) Visit the SAC Web site: <http://www.ieee-ras.org/membercommunities/students> for information on new programs, conference events, and ways to get involved.
- 2) Follow the SAC on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/ieeerassac>, and join the RAS Facebook group at facebook.com/groups/ieeerassac.
- 3) Contact us with questions, suggestions, and feedback at ras_sac@ieee.org.

Conference Activities

One of the major efforts of the SAC is organizing events and activities during the RAS flagship conferences. These events give students the opportunity to network with their peers, interact with

leaders in our field, and have some fun. The current SAC board had the opportunity to organize events at the 2014 IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation (ICRA) (Figure 1) and the IEEE/Robotics Society of Japan International Conference on Intelligent Robots and Systems (IROS). Becoming a tradition, we hosted Lunch with Leaders events at ICRA and IROS, as well as during the IEEE Conference on Automation Science and Engineering (CASE). Lunch with Leaders provides students with the opportunity to sit down with RAS and industry leaders more than a casual lunch.

The SAC has also been organizing several new types of programming at conferences, including coffee breaks where students can unload or work between sessions with access to Wi-Fi, coffee, and snacks, as well as social and networking opportunities just for students. During ICRA 2014 in Hong Kong, we had more than 50 students turn up for a pub crawl to close out the conference, and at IROS 2014, we had a

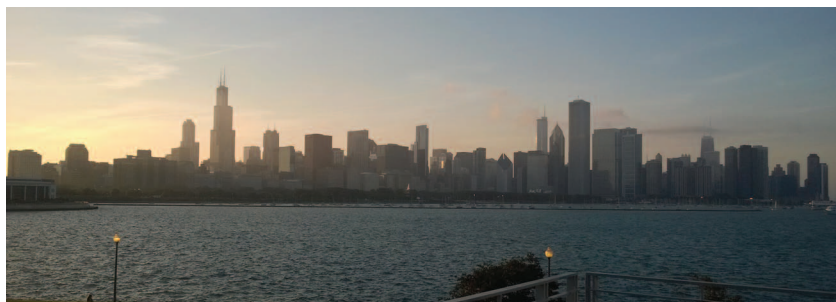


Figure 1. A view of the Chicago skyline from the Adler Planetarium during an IROS student social event. (Photo courtesy of Kevin Luck.)

great turnout at the two SAC-organized networking events. Roughly 130 students attended a meet-up at a local restaurant during the conference, and more than 150 attended an event at the Adler Planetarium in Chicago, Illinois, for a robotics-themed event featuring open access to the planetarium, samples of local craft beers, live bands, and a panel of robotics professors from ICRA. We had a great time meeting everyone and will be working hard to plan events for ICRA, IROS, and CASE 2015. Thank you to everyone who participated, and please let us know if you have suggestions for future events.

Increasing Student Engagement and Representation in the Society

The SAC is actively working on getting more students involved in the Society. In addition, we are in the first few months of an exciting new initiative in partnership with several of the RAS governing boards. More than a dozen student volunteers have recently started working directly with several boards, including the Industrial Activities Board, the Publications Activities Board, the Conference Activities Board, the Conference Editorial Board, and the Transactions on Automatic Science and Engineering Editorial Board.

Student volunteers will act as liaisons between the SAC and the other governing boards and will be involved with various areas of each board's activities. This partnership will benefit the Society as a whole by developing a base of young and engaged volunteers who will become knowledgeable about RAS activities and who may go on to become future leaders in the RAS. Our student volunteers will, in turn, get the unique opportunity to see how the RAS conferences, publications, and industrial activities are planned and managed, to work directly with leaders in our field, and to work with the SAC. On behalf of the RAS student population, the SAC would like to thank the boards mentioned for their support and engagement, the students for volunteering, and Nancy Amato for working with the SAC in organizing this effort.

YRP: Toward the Improvement of Peer Review Skills for RAS Students

The YRP aims at introducing IEEE RAS students to sound practices in peer reviewing of scientific papers. To achieve this objective, student YRP members will be supervised by senior reviewers (SRs) in regular RAS review procedures. In addition to such a mentor-mentee relationship, YRP members will have the opportunity to attend Webinars and online tutorials to further explore and improve their writing and reviewing skills. Once a certain level of expertise is achieved, the YRP member will graduate with an overall qualification grade.

It is important to note here that within the YRP, the timing and the quality of the review to be delivered to the associate editors will be monitored and certified by the SRs. In addition, the YRP will apply multiple safeguards to maintain confidentiality in the peer-review process.

Details of the YRP and membership applications will be announced soon and posted on the SAC Web site (<http://www.ieee-ras.org/member-communities/students>). Meanwhile, we are looking forward to receiving your suggestions!

—The YRP committee:

Arash Ajoudani (Arash.Ajoudani@iit.it),
Tamás Haidegger, Pat Wensing,
Lauren Miller, and Jory Denny.



Figure 2. From left: IROS 2014 student reporters Guillaume Trehard, and Kim-Doang Nguyen, SAC chair Lauren Miller, SAC cochair Pat Wensing, and IROS 2014 student reporter Zijian Zhang. (Photo courtesy of Kathy Colabaugh.)



Figure 3. Student reporter Kim-Doang Nguyen (second from right) with a group of students outside the Art Institute of Chicago before the IROS banquet. (Photo courtesy of Zijian Zhang.)

Student Reporting

During IROS 2014, the SAC worked with IROS Social Media Chair Andrea Zanchettin to organize a group of student volunteers to act as reporters during the conferences. Our student volunteers were Guillaume Trehard

from the French Institute for Research in Computer Science and Automation, Kevin Luck from Technische Universität Darmstadt, Kartik Talamadupula from Arizona State University, Zijian Zhang from the Harbin Institute of Technology, and Kim-Doang Nguyen

from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. These students kept the IROS Facebook and Twitter sites busy with photos and posts, helping to broaden the reach of conference activities. Photos of several of them can be seen in Figures 2 and 3, and many more can be seen on the IROS2014 Facebook page.

In addition to reporting at conferences, the SAC is also developing ways to showcase student news and events happening worldwide. We have initiated a restructuring of the RAS Web page to feature student-focused news and calendar feeds, which will also be adopted by other member communities. We hope this format will allow us to gather news and event information from international RAS student branches and indi-

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vidual members and to easily publicize that information electronically and through social media. We are looking for student reporters to actively encourage submission of stories, so please get in touch if you are interested in helping out with this effort.

Logo Design and Video Competitions

This fall also concluded a design contest to find a logo to use in student-related RAS e-news and announcements on the SAC Web site and on promotional material at events. Over the course of a few months, we received about 30 designs from students all over the world. The student community voted on the winning design, which can be seen in Figure 4. Santiago Morante, a Ph.D. student at the Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, created the winning logo. We received many fantastic designs and would like to thank everyone for submitting. We had a lot of fun looking through all the fantastic submissions.



Figure 4. The winning design from the SAC Logo Design Contest created by Santiago Morante.

Looking forward, we are currently accepting submissions for a student video contest and will feature the winner at ICRA 2015. The details can be found on the SAC Web site. 

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