ANNUAL REPORT for SIGIR, July 1998 - June 1999

Nicholas Belkin, Past-Chair SIGIR and Susan Dumais, Chair SIGIR

SIGIR again had a busy and fruitful year in 1998-1999, sponsoring or co-sponsoring several quite successful conferences, and offering a number of member services. Although we continued to suffer a small decline in membership, the rate of decline was slightly above the ACM SIG mean, and attendance at conferences continues to increase.

A new set of officers was elected and installed at the SIGIR'99 Conference in August. The new officers are: Susan Dumais, Chair; Susan Gauch, Vice-Chair; Liz Liddy, Secretary, and Jamie Callan, Treasurer. In our continuing effort to make SIGIR a truly international organization, Peter Schaeuble (ETH Zurich) and Ross Wilkinson (CSIRO) were appointed regional representatives to the SIGIR Executive Committee. Many thanks to the outgoing officers, Nick Belkin, Chair; Howard Turtle, Vice-Chair; Elke Mittendorf, Secretary and Susan Gauch, Treasurer, who have all worked hard to make SIGIR a successful organization.

Our main event during this period was, as usual the Annual Conference of SIGIR, formally known as the Annual ACM SIGIR International Conference on Research and Development in Information Retrieval. The 1998 meeting was held in Melbourne, Australia, and jointly hosted by the Departments of Computer Science at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and the University of Melbourne. This was the first SIGIR conference to be held outside of North America or Europe. The expansion of SIGIR-related activities in the Asia-Pacific region is a strongly encouraging trend. Alistair Moffat (University of Melbourne) and Justin Zobel (RMIT) served as the conference Co-Chairs. As in the past, this was a quite successful meeting, both intellectually and financially. The submissions, attendance and awards all reflect the strong international participation in SIGIR which is especially gratifying. More than 250 people attended the conference. In addition to the main technical program, there was a strong tutorial program proceeding the meeting, and a varied workshop program following the meeting. The Best Student Paper Award went to Warren Greiff (University of Massachusetts, Amherst); Best Non-Student Paper to Martin Wechsler, Eugen Munteanu and Peter Schaeuble (ETH, Zurich); Best Poster to Ming-Jer Lee and Lee-Feng Chien Academica (Sinica, Tapei). Surplus revenue which came back to SIGIR in the form of a donation to the Student Travel Support Fund was ~$17,000.

SIGIR is also involved in the sponsorship of two other ACM conferences, CIKM and DL. CIKM'98, the Seventh International Conference on Information and Knowledge Management, was co-sponsored by SIGIR and SIGMIS. The 1998 meeting was held in Bethesda, Maryland, with Niki Pissinou (University of Southwestern Louisiana) and Charles Nichols (University of Maryland, Baltimore County) serving as Conference Co-Chairs. CIKM '98 had 265 attendees, up from the previous year. Financially, the conference was quite successful, with a surplus of $36,500. Each sponsoring SIG received $18,270 of the surplus and $4,936 of allocation to SIG sponsors, for a total

revenue of $23,206. CIKM has a stong focus on databases and knowledge bases, but continues to expand to more general issues of information and knowledge management. This year there was a particularly strong representation on text summarization, clustering, classification and learning algorithms. Keynote addresses by Alon Levy (University of Washington) and Ed Addison (KnowledgeLink Interactive) focused on database and knowledge management perspectives, respectively.

DL'98, the Fourth ACM Conference on Digital Libraries, was held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. DL'98 was co-sponsored by SIGIR and SIGWEB (formerly SIGLINK). DL'98 was co-located with Hypertext (HT'98), the ACM Hypertext Conference, with Rob Akscyn (Knowledge Systems) chairing both conferences. There are no final attendance or financial figures available yet. An important event was the keynote speech by Doug Englebart, the 1997 Turing Award winner, which was held as a joint event of both meetings, as the close of HT'98 and the beginning of DL'98. This managed to bring both communities together very nicely, and to demonstrate quite tangibly their relationships to one another. DL'99 will be co-located with SIGIR'99 in Berkeley, California. This pairing of conferences provides a complimentary theoretical and practical perspective on information access and management. In 2000, DL will again be co-locate with Hypertext, and Peter J. Nürnberg and David L. Hicks will serve as conference co-chairs for both conferences. Because of the growing interest and reputation of the conference, beginning in 2001, DL will operate on its own without co-location.

During 1998-1999, members of the ACM DL Steering Committee continued their discussions on merger of ACM DL and IEEE ADL with representatives of ADL. The idea of the merger was based on two factors: 1) the desirability of increasing the scope of each of the meetings (that of ACM DL to include more practical, system and policy contribuitons; and that of ADL to include more research contributions); and, 2) the seeming undesirability of having two competing conferences in a relatively small domain held only a few months apart. These discussions were unable to result in a formal merger for the 2000 meetings, but we are optimistic that a joint meeting can be held by 2001. The DL Steering Committee consists of two representatives each from SIGIR and SIGWEB, and the conference chairs of the immediate past two ACM DL and ADL conferences. The Steering Committee appoints an Advisory Committee, consisting of representatives from organizations with strong interests in digital libraries (e.g. The Library of Congress, the American Society for Information Science, the American Library Association, the National Science Foundation). Together, these two bodies maintain continuity from year to year, select conference Chairs, and advise on the content and structure of the conferences. Future ACM DL conferences will continue to maintain a strong research focus, but will also invite contributions in areas such as operating system descriptions and social, economic and policy issues of digital libraries. SIGIR and SIGWEB will continue to be equal co-sponsors of the series.

Although interest in information retrieval is growing, and SIGIR-sponsored conferences are seeing steadily increasing attendance, membership continues to slowly decline. The news has been better recently, but this is still a major problem which the new SIGIR EC will be addressing in the coming year. Several avenues are being considered, including a

more active publicity campaign, offering new membership services (especially online services), and, developing stronger ties with related organizations including more joint meetings. Since our problem is common to many ACM SIGs, we also look to them for collaboration in addressing this issue.

SIGIR's Information Officer, Charles Viles (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), did a fine job in maintaining and expanding the SIGIR home page. This has become an important resource for IR researchers and practitioners, and we anticipate that its influence will continue to grow. We are now establishing a survey to determine what other information and services our members, and potential members, would like to have added to this resource.

Thanks again are due to the joint editors of SIGIR Forum, Bill Hersh and Fazli Can, who have successfully developed this journal into both a news forum and an important scientific forum. Plans are in place to work with the information officer to move the Forum to electronic delivery beginning in the fall of 1999.

SIGIR had a productive and successful year, with important intellectual and social contributions. We continue to attract new members, our conferences have been remarkably successful in all senses, our financial situation is quite healthy. We look forward with great anticipation to the next year, and hope to see many new faces, as well as many familiar ones, at this year's meetings.