Trip Report: The University of Maryland Human-Computer Interaction Laboratory's 17th annual Symposium and Open House

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This year's Symposium and Open House <http://www.cs.umd.edu/hcil/soh> marked an epic turning point in the Human Computer Interaction Laboratory's 17 year history. After the pre-conference workshops and tutorials on June 1st, everyone gathered in the early evening at a heartwarming ceremony and stylishly catered reception to share a Champagne toast as the HCIL's Founding Director, Professor Ben Shneiderman, turned over the directorship of the lab to his friend and colleague, Professor Ben Bederson.

As we all know, Ben Shneiderman is perhaps one of the most important figures in the history of the discipline of Human-Computer Interaction. His groundbreaking work at the HCIL has given us such staples as embedded menus and touchable graphics - the now familiar hyperlinks and image maps that drive the world wide web.

The list goes on and those interested in the history of the HCIL should update their libraries to include a copy of "Sparks of Innovation in Human-Computer Interaction" Edited by Ben Shneiderman (Ablex Publishers, 1993; ISBN 1-56750-078-1 — now available from Intellect Books). More recent work at the lab has looked at dynamic queries, information visualization, and multilingual information retrieval to mention but a few of the many topics being explored by interdisciplinary teams of HCIL researchers and students <http://www.cs.umd.edu/hcil/research>.

In reflecting back on his experiences building the HCIL and helping to shape the HCI field, Professor Shneiderman was greatly satisfied to hear himself de-scribed by Gary Rubloff as being "Lucky, Pioneering, and Fun". To that, I would add honest, caring, and gifted with the ability to bring out the best in those around him.

Fortunately, Ben Shneiderman's illustrious career is far from over, and we can take consolation in knowing that he will "continue as an HCIL member at UMD, with increased freedom to explore new topics such as creativity support tools and the policy-linked issues of university usability" and "continue as an advocate of rigorous scientific methods of research (from controlled studies to ethnographic) and socially beneficial applications."

The future of the HCIL under Ben Bederson's leadership is equally bright. After being recruited in 1997 with Allison Druin, whose passion is working with children as design partners, Professor Bederson championed the concept of Zoomable User Interfaces and brought us open source Java libraries <http://www.cs.umd.edu/hcil/jazz> so we can all share in the implementation of his vision.

Looking forward to a period of expansion for the HCIL, Professor Bederson observed that "in order to maintain our position as a preeminent research lab, we must continue to change. We intend to build on our already strong research, educational and service programs. Just as importantly, we will build upon our interdisciplinary strengths. Our goal remains the same: to do world-class research, and to attract the best students, faculty and staff."

The Symposium proper, held on June 2, 2000, featured a retrospective of the lab's history, perspectives on the transi-

tion, and exciting demonstrations like Professor Bederson's latest work on Fish Eye Menus <http://www.cs.umd.edu/hcil/fisheyemenu>. Throughout the day, many presentations were made using the lab's own Kid Pad software <http://www.kidpad.org>. Kid Pad provides a zoomable user interface for hypertext authoring with single display groupware functionality and support for enactment of hyperlink traversal. Symposium attendees were provided with a CD containing copies of Kid Pad and PhotoFinder - a program that supports direct annotation of personal photo libraries < as well as a two volume set of Video Reports illustrating the lab's key achievements.

It would be impossible to do justice to all of the ongoing work presented by the HCIL ensemble in this limited space, so the interested reader is encouraged to visit the lab on the web <http://www.cs.umd.edu/hcil> where they can download technical reports and learn about all of the lab's other research activities.

The HCIL Symposium Series has turned into a significant HCI mini-conference in its own right. Next year an even more exciting and diverse group of participants from around the world will gather at College Park to discuss their work and to share in the exciting innovations that continue to emerge from the HCIL — I'll be there. ❖

Workshop Report: Online Communities. Supporting Sociability, Designing Usability

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On June 1, 2000, I had the privilege of participating in a workshop that was held in conjunction with the 17th Annual Symposium and Open House at the University of Maryland College Park's Human-Computer Interaction Lab. It was chaired by Jean Gasen, Jonathan Lazar, and Jenny Preece (whose new book, "Online Communities: Designing Usability, Supporting Sociability", ISBN 0471805998, is being published by Wiley). This was the second year in which the organizers addressed the topic of Online Communities in this form and it was immediately evident from the number of participants in this year's event that interest in the topic is on the rise.

You can find a full list of the participants and a number of their writings on the Workshop Web Site. Those in attendance fell into several 'camps' mirroring the makeup of our own hypertext community, with 'sys builders' and the like. In

addition to the expected numbers representing various constituencies in higher education, there was also a strong and rather unexpected .com contingent from the commercial sector probing questions of 'profitability' and 'data collection' policy for their business as well as their social ramifications. While a few of these exchanges may have felt a bit out of place in our academic setting, the fact that commercial interests would embrace such a forum is actually rather encouraging when one thinks about it.

The two major goals of the workshop were to look at how we can make the software that supports virtual communities more accessible to a wider range of users and how we can manage the interpersonal relationships that unfold in this environment to address disputes, guard or profit from personal information provided by community members, and sustain our online communities over time.

The workshop website can be found at: http://triton.towson.edu/~jlazar/hcil2000/oc_workshop.html