

Running A SIGIR Conference

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The ACM SIGIR Conference on Research and Development in Information Retrieval was first held in the late 1970s. It now has a well-established structure, and many traditions that regular attendees have become accustomed to.

Here we review these structures and some of the specific arrangements. This document is available at www.cs.rmit.edu.au/~jz/conferences. A companion document, discussing conference organisation in general, is available at the same location.

Calendar

SIGIR is almost always run over a 5-day calendar. In the Americas and Europe it starts on a Sunday; in its one appearance elsewhere, in Australia, it started on a Monday, due to Australia being far ahead of the US (timewise, that is!). Within the year, the conference has always been in June, July, August, or September.

Day 1 Tutorials: Most tutorials are half-day, with typically three to five held concurrently and thus six to ten across the day. Whether lunch is provided varies from year to year, but coffee and biscuits are always provided at morning and afternoon breaks.

Only a fraction of attendees — perhaps a quarter — attend the tutorials. Because the tutorials are small, they may be held at a separate venue. Fees and costs are structured to ensure that the tutorials return a significant profit, but also that presenters are reimbursed for their contribution to the conference.

A welcome reception is held in the evening of this first day. Most of the attendees for the main track arrive the evening before, and appreciate the chance to catch up with colleagues; the reception provides a natural meeting venue. It is not usually an elaborate affair, and should be informal, unstructured, and friendly.

Conference registration facilities should be available at both the tutorial venue and the reception, so that attendees can collect their proceedings and nametags.

Day 2 The first day of the technical program. The program begins with introductory speeches and sometimes (not to everyone's pleasure) a non-technical speaker such as a local mayor or politician.

The “office hours” part of the day, roughly 9am to 5pm, is taken up with technical presentations, often starting with a plenary invited talk. As for the tutorials and workshops, the decision to provide lunch varies from year to year, and should be influenced by the nearby availability (or otherwise) of appropriate eateries.

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The evening is taken up with the poster and demonstration sessions, which typically are scheduled for 3–4 hours (and in a good year will remain busy right up to closing time) and run concurrently. The session is well-attended, with delegates lured by the catering: finger food is provided, usually with alcohol. The standard of catering has varied but in the best years it has been excellent, and delegates expect to get a satisfying meal over the course of the evening.

Another of the regular SIGIR events takes place in the morning, just before the conference starts: the newcomers' breakfast. People at their first SIGIR (who thus probably don't know many, if any, of the other attendees) are given a well-catered breakfast, hosted by a small number of SIGIR regulars (typically the various chairs, plus some well-chosen members of the program committee), whose job it is to break the ice and make the newcomers welcome.

Day 3 The middle of the three days of technical sessions. The office-hours part of the day is given to presentations, often with a plenary session at 9am.

The main conference social event, the banquet, is in the evening. The conference tradition is that it be memorable (sometimes it is all too memorable, *que sera sera*), neither tacky nor formal, well-catered (including for vegetarians and others requiring alternative food; and often including provision of wine), and not overburdened with speeches. Prizes are presented at the banquet and there is usually an opportunity for the unofficial SIGIR clown, whoever the clown of the era happens to be, to make a complete idiot of her- or himself (g'day!)

Day 4 The last day of technical sessions. Typically close of business is a earlier than on the other days, to allow people to start their journeys home. Again, there is often a plenary session to start the presentations.

The middle of the day is given to the SIGIR business session, which is the annual meeting of the SIG at which decisions are taken about issues such as finance, future conference venues, and new initiatives. A box lunch is typically provided so that the meeting can continue over the mealtime; it usually lasts about two hours altogether.

Day 5 The main conference is followed by several all-day workshops, typically four to six that run concurrently. These are relatively low key, but do attract 100–150 attendees.

There are numerous floating events. Several of the journals and other conferences in the information retrieval area hold their editorial meetings at SIGIR. Perhaps the most significant of these meetings is the Chairs dinner, at which past, present, and future SIGIR Program and General chairs eat at a nice restaurant at the conference's expense. There are typically 20–30 chairs in attendance, all occupied by people.

Venue

SIGIR is usually held in a major city, not at a resort. In some years it is held in a large hotel, in others at a university campus. Attendees expect reasonable facilities and plenty of break-out opportunities: a lot of business, some of it only tangentially related to the conference, is conducted while SIGIR is in session.

Attendance

The main track of the conference typically has 200-300 people when held outside North America, and 350-450 when in North America. Each tutorial has 20-70 attendees; tutorials with too few advance registrations (say 10) should be cancelled. Each workshop has 20-70 attendees. The sizes of the tutorials and workshops do not vary greatly from year to year, but the number offered does.

Prizes

In recent years, prizes have been awarded to both best paper and best student paper. If the best student paper also happens to be the best paper, it gets both prizes. A best poster award has been made in some years. These prizes are chosen by the program chairs after the program committee meeting has recommended a shortlist. Typical values of the prizes are US\$500 each.

Every third year the Salton Award is made, in recognition of extended contribution to the field of Information Retrieval. The recipient is chosen by the SIGIR executive.

Financial arrangements

As part of the conference budget, a range of people get support such as travel funding or free conference registration. Full travel support is provided for the program chairs to attend the program committee meeting, and some travel support is also provided to the area coordinators where they are unable to obtain funds from other sources.

Travel funding, accommodation, and free registration is provided to keynote speakers. The program chairs, tutorial presenters, and workshop chairs get free conference registration, but do not receive travel support to the conference. The one exception is the case of a program chair who has waived travel support for the program committee meeting.

Tutorial presenters are paid a proportion of the registration fees received for their tutorial such as 50%. This amount is sometimes capped, at for example 50% of 30 registrations. The cost of duplicating tutorial notes, room hire, facilities hire, and catering is borne by the conference.

Student volunteers get free registration, in exchange for say 10 hours labour, and may receive free banquet tickets. (It is our experience that a good number of full registrants will opt out of the banquet, thus leaving places for students.)

The SIGIR executive (usually the Treasurer) administers a student travel fund. Student authors of accepted papers or posters are eligible to apply; preference is given to student authors who are presenting at the conference. Funding of these particular students is not explicitly part of the conference budget, but the SIGIR executive requires a contribution to the student travel fund from each conference.

Registration & SIGIR Membership

In 2001 SIGIR changed its conference registration practices so that non-members who register for the conference are automatically enrolled in SIGIR for a year. People can opt out, but few do. There are two main impacts on conference organization.

- Registration forms must disclose the automatic enrollment and include an opt-out provision. If ACM handles your registration, they'll do that for you.
- The conference must pay ACM \$30 (USD) for each non-member that registers and does not opt out. The conference organizer must include this fee in calculations when setting registration prices. The simplest method is probably to increase non-member prices by \$30 above whatever is needed to run the conference, and to treat opt outs as unplanned income, but the method is up to the organizer.

“In Cooperation” Status

Historically, the SIGIR conference has cooperated with several other IR-related groups, for example the British Computer Society (BCS). Cooperation relationships are typically initiated by the conference committee, but an organization like BCS can approach the conference as well. Cooperation involves no financial commitment. The other organization agrees to lend its name, list the conference in its calendar, and help publicize the conference. In the past the other organization has often been responsible for mailing publicity flyers (supplied by SIGIR) to its members. In

return, its members are charged the member registration rate, instead of the non-member rate. BCS and GI have long been affiliates for the SIGIR Conference.

A quick way to check “in cooperation” status of past SIGIR conferences is to look at the proceedings. Usually the logos of the other societies are listed on the cover, or on an inside page. Here is a list of the “in cooperation” relationships for some recent SIGIR conferences.

2001: ASIS (USA), BCS-IRSG (UK), GI (GER), AICA-GLIR (Italy)

2000: ???

1999: BCS-IRSG (UK), GI (GER)

1998: BCS-IRSG (UK), GI (GER), and IPSJ (Japan)

1997: BCS-IRSG (UK), GI (GER), and IPSJ (Japan)

Because of the long-standing relationship with BCS-IRSG and GI, it is good to be proactive about contacting these societies. (Other organizations have varied from year to year, but those two have been constant.) The conference chair can contact the chairs of BCS-IRSG and GI to ask if they'd like to officially cooperate.

Proceedings

The proceedings have settled to a highly consistent structure. The front matter contains, in addition to the usual imprint and list of contents, the program chairs' preface, the general chairs' preface, lists of area coordinators, program committee members, and reviewers, and lists of other contributors. A complete author index is provided at the back.

There are usually three program chairs, one from each region: the Americas, Europe, and Asia and Australasia. For management purposes, one has nominal seniority, but the three divide the labour as equally as is feasible.

The general chair is responsible for ensuring that the proceedings are in good order: complete, free of glitches, and delivered on time.

It is necessary to look carefully at every page of every paper, especially if final copy is being lodged electronically. Unexpected font substitutions, for example, are a highly unfortunate thing to discover once the proceedings have gone to press. Papers will have been prepared with a great variety of tools. Considerable effort is required on the part of the chair to make sure that the printed papers are in the correct format (physical layout); that the electronic versions are exactly identical to the printed versions; and that the electronic versions can all be viewed correctly using a single standard utility such as the PDF viewer Acroread.

It may be difficult for anyone other than the paper author to identify some types of printing problems, for example, mangled characters in mathematical formulae, or mangled figures. One solution is for the publisher to provide “electronic galley proofs” to authors via the Web, so that authors can verify that their papers are correct before the proceedings is printed. Raise this issue with your proceedings publisher early, because publishers vary in their ability to provide this type of service.

Decision-making

Responsibility for all aspects of the technical program rests with the program chairs. A number of other people contribute to these decisions. For example, it is usual for a tutorial chair to be appointed, who seeks and collates advice on tutorial proposals and brings recommendations to the program committee meeting. The paper presentations are chosen by the program chairs, in consultation with the area coordinators. The other elements of the technical program — the tutorials, workshops, invited speakers, posters, and demonstrations — are also decided at the same

meeting. It is usual for this meeting to be held in late March at a venue chosen by the program chairs. All area coordinators commit to attending this meeting.

The program chairs allocate papers to sessions and suggest an arrangement of sessions to fill the three days, including specifying which sessions are plenary and which are in parallel.

Acceptance Letters

The acceptance letters usually contain at least the following information:

- Reviews
- Information about submitting the camera-ready copy
- Information about applying for student travel scholarships

Tutorials Guide

Tutorials are fun to organize. They are not all that much work, and you get to interact with many of the leaders in the field. These notes are intended to serve as an overall guide about how SIGIR Tutorials have worked in the past. Another very valuable resource is the Tutorials Chair from the previous year. They will have copies of the submission and review forms they used as well as communications w/ people from the previous year. They can tell you what went right, wrong the previous year!

Submission/Review Process

Submissions

This is pretty straightforward. Here's what they ask for on the SIGIR 2002 web site, and this seems fine.

SIGIR 2002 will begin with a full day of tutorials, each of which should cover a single topic in detail. Proposals are solicited for tutorials of either a half day (3 hours plus breaks) or full day (6 hours plus breaks). Submissions should be made to the Tutorials Chair and should include a cover sheet and an extended abstract. The cover sheet should specify:

- the length of the tutorial.
- the intended audience (introductory, intermediate, advanced).
- complete contact information for the contact person and other presenters.
- brief biographies (max. 2 paragraphs) of the presenters.

The extended abstract should be 3 to 5 pages, and should include an outline of the tutorial, along with descriptions of the course objectives and course materials. Tutorial proposals must be sent via email by DATE, to ORGANIZER.

We've tended to use the same submission deadline as for workshops, posters, which is later than the main papers deadline. This works well since many of the presenters will submit papers, and this minimizes conflicts.

You may want to solicit Tutorials. This is best done before the deadline and can be a nice way to pull in people from related disciplines that are thematically related, geographically desirable, or just interesting. The first UI and Web Tutorials were recruited by twisting a few arms. Make sure not to promise acceptance. One year I recruited a Web tutorial, and we also had one submitted on the same topic, so we needed to work out overlap issues.

There have sometimes been no tutorials submitted on an important topic – this mostly happens when no Intro Tutorial is submitted. When this happens, you need to decide whether you want it and then twist some arms after the fact.

Reviewing

Try to have the review committee look at all the proposals and RANK them from 1 to N. There are typically 12-15 proposals, so this isn't all that much work and gives the reviewers a nice perspective for what's being offered. A good committee size is 8-10 reviewers, with different backgrounds and broad knowledge of IR. Ask the previous chair for the review form they used; people tweak it from year to year. Mostly, it's not an issue of quality, but rather trying to get a nice balance of Topics, Level (intro, intermediate), Geographic Distribution, etc. If there is overlap on topics, you can accept just one, ask people to merge, or if there's enough interest for two you can do an intro in the morning and an advanced session in the afternoon (which we did for Web stuff one year). You can also ask people to shorten or lengthen a proposal, depending on how many other proposals you have.

Send Out Accept/Reject Decisions

Miscellaneous

There are a few other things you'll need to keep track of. Best to get the relevant deadlines straight with the conference chair early on.

Tutorial Description and Bio(s): These are needed for the web site and printed materials. You need this early on. Find out what's needed when and ask for it when you send out the acceptance notifications.

AV equipment: Try to minimize this (computer projector most common now); check on this early and often, and communicate w/ presenters and local conference organizers. Discourage interactive web demos (both because of costs of linking to the Internet at hotels, and because it's often distracting and not all that helpful).

Copy handouts: When I chaired, I offered to do this and ship to conference site. You can also get local people to do it. It's most expensive when the presenters do it themselves since they usually go to the local copy center, get fancy covers, etc. Need to know roughly how many people are registered for each tutorial, so you can't do it too much ahead of time. It's better to make too many handouts (and sell the leftovers at the conference) than to run out. I've asked for information about how many early and on-site registrations there are to help in better estimating the scaling factor based on early registration numbers. My memory is about 25% of Tutorials attendees register onsite.

Onsite: Try to be there for the Tutorials day (usually the Sunday before the main conference). You can act as an intermediary between the presenters, local arrangements, and ACM staff. One thing that often happens is that the registration process is slow on the first day, and people are afraid of missing their Tutorials. If it's only a matter of getting a few minutes, you can delay the start of the tutorials. If it's a real mess, you can just tell people to go to their tutorials and register later.

Reimbursement to Presenters

Tutorials are one of the most popular attractions at SIGIR conferences, and they help attract new comers. They are historically a money maker at SIGIR conferences. In order to attract great people, SIGIR pays the tutorial presenters, as do many of the other ACM conferences.

- Each TUTORIAL gets \$1000 guaranteed. For tutorials having more than 20 attendees, they get an additional \$50 per person up to a maximum of \$1500. (This rate has been in effect since roughly 1999. Before that the amounts were \$500/\$1500, but we increased the minimum to encourage participation from outside the community.)

- Each INSTRUCTOR or TUTORIAL gets a free conference registration. Some years free registrations have been at the TUTORIAL level. Other years at the INSTRUCTOR level. I prefer giving each INSTRUCTOR a free conference registration, but you may want to set a limit to bound costs – e.g., one proposal this year has 4 instructors. Registration applied only to the conference and not to Tutorials or Workshops. Logistics of how this works, especially w/ web registration varies from year to year. Remind conference chair and keep an eye on the web site to make sure this is possible. Also note that the conference chair will view these free registrations as lost income for the conference, so the total number of free registrations must be kept within reason.
- We used to cancel tutorials if there were not enough people who had signed up in early registration. I don't think this has been done in recent years, but it's worth considering. For example, if there are fewer than 10 people registered 3 weeks ahead of time, cancel the Tutorial. If a Tutorial is cancelled for lack of interest, the presenter still got a free conference registration but not the \$1000. The tradeoff here is that the projections are the closer you get to the conference, but the presenters have put in more work and made travel plans the longer you wait. Probably not a big deal if the person will attend anyway, but more of a problem if they wouldn't attend otherwise. In '97 we cancelled one Tutorial, about 1 month before the conference. In '99 there were a few that were close to the 10 limit 3 weeks out, and we decided to keep all of them. This is a bit of a headache to manage, especially since the pre-registration figures are rough, and can be a week or more behind. Don't cancel anything late (e.g., onsite), since presenters have already put in all the work and have travelled to the conference.

More generally, decide on these ground rules early and make the rules very clear in the letter you send to the Accepted Tutorials presenters.

- There may be some room size constraints – e.g., max size of 100. If so, you'll need to monitor registration. This hasn't been a problem for online registration, but has come up onsite.
- You might get asked about what to charge for Tutorials. Take a look at the previous year, and work w/ the conference chair to estimate costs (AV, Copying, Instructor Payments). SIGIR Tutorials are very reasonably priced. I'd like to see us keep roughly the same rates, but we also need to be sure not to lose money, and preferably even make a bit of money.

Organizational Memory - Tutorials, Rough Counts

Some overall reflections and over generalizations. Multimedia retrieval has never attracted all that many folks. Recently, attendance at multilingual tutorials has also dropped off, perhaps because much of the multilingual work gets done in CLEF which is associated w/ ECDL. Web stuff is hot right now as is machine learning. Anything Dave Lewis offers is well-attended (NLP, Machine Learning, Text Classif in Vivo).

The counts are probably off some. It's hard to get real registration counts. With ACM doing the registration, this should be easier. The years I ran tutorials (97, 99), I just counted how many people were in the room. This is almost certainly an overestimate, since I suspect that many people just 'sit in' for free! While the absolute numbers might be off, the relative numbers (within a year) are reasonable and should serve as a guide to what was popular.

Number of tutorials to aim for. My rough rule of thumb would be 6 or 7 in Europe and 8 or 9 in the US. In Berkeley we had more than this, because we thought the local community would bring in a number of people, and this worked fine.

Below is detailed information from recent SIGIR conferences. We hope that future Tutorial Chairs will update this information each year.

SIGIR '01, New Orleans

Attendance	Title	Tutor(s)
14	Intro to IR	Sanderson
61	Web IR	Bharat, Hawking
13	Multilingual info access	Peters, Sheridan
22	Text summarization	Radev
58	Combining text and link-based IR on the web	Broder, Raghavan
49	Text classification and text mining in vivo	Lewis
22	Designing info architectures for search	Hearst
7	Practical digital libraries overview	Fox
246	Total (153 people?)	

SIGIR '00, Athens

Rough counts based on how much people were paid - only the two machine learning tutorials were paid more than the \$1000 minimum. Several of the 20 could be more like 10.

Attendance	Title	Tutor(s)
20	Intro to IR and web-based searching	Sanderson
30	Intro to machine learning for IR	Lewis, Singer
5	New directions in multilingual IR (cancelled because of poor registration)	Klavans, Schauble
20	User interfaces and visualization for info access	Hearst
20	Implementation of high performance IR systems	Zobel
30	Advanced machine learning for IR	Singer, Lewis
20	Text summarization	Radev
20	Intro to IR evaluation including TREC	Hersh
79	Total (according to Program Chair); looks more like 120 by rough counts	

SIGIR '99, Berkeley

Rough counts based on people in the room. I know I had better numbers than this, but I can't find them. I'll keep looking.

Attendance	Title	Tutor(s)
25	Intro to IR	Croft
40	Intro to machine learning for IR	Lewis, Singer
25	User-interface design for IR and e-commerce and performance tools	Marcus
20	Content based image retrieval	Manmatha, Ravela
30	Multilingual IA	Klavans, Schauble
40	Implementation of High-Performance IR systems	Moffat, Zobel
20	Medical Informatics: Acquisition, storage and use of info in health care	Hersh
90	Inside internet search engines	Pedersen, Chang
30	Automated text summarization	Hovy, Lin, Marcu
20	Theory and practice in text retrieval system evaluation	Buckley, Voorhees
40	Advanced machine learning for IR	Singer, Lewis
380	Total	

SIGIR '98, Melbourne

Attendance	Title	Tutor(s)
24	Multimedia information retrieval	Fuhr
30	Models in information retrieval	Gey, Robertson
16	Metadata on the internet	Hannella
15	Evaluation of information retrieval systems	Hersh
30	Machine learning for information retrieval	Lewis
16	Content-based image retrieval	Manmatha, Ravela
22	Practical digital libraries	Witten, McNab
153	Total	

SIGIR '97, Philadelphia

Rough counts based on people in the room.

Attendance	Title	Tutor(s)
30	Multimedia information retrieval	Fuhr
30	Algorithmic and cog approaches for IR	Ingwersen, Willett
25	IR systems: research and design methods	Fidel, Smith
50	Implementation of high-performance IR systems	Moffat, Zobel
70	Machine learning for IR	Lewis
50	Software agents for IR	Finin et al.
25	Evaluation of IR systems	Hersh/Robertson
25	Cross-language IR	Oard
305	Total	

SIGIR '96, Zurich

Attendance	Title	Tutor(s)
39	Algorithmic and CogApproaches for IR	P.Ingwersen, P.Willett
14	The Use of Logic in IR Modelling	M.Lalmas, P.Bruza
20	Building and Applying Digital Libraries	E.A.Fox
21	Evaluation of IR Systems	W.R.Hersh, M.Beaulieu
38	Models in Information Retrieval	F.C.Gey
132	Total	

SIGIR '95, Seattle

I could only find the titles here not the numbers. Neither the conference chair nor the tutorials chair could find the info.

Attendance	Title	Tutor(s)
??	Introduction to IR	P. Willett and P. Ingwersen
??	Query-Document Symmetry and Duality	Stephen Robertson
??	Statistical Analysis of IR Tests	J. Tague-Sutcliffe, et al.
??	Designing Information for the Computer Screen	Paul Kahn
??	Data Fusion in IR	Paul Kantor
??	Total	

Acceptance Letter

The tutorial acceptance letter used for SIGIR 2001 is provided below, as an example. The entire tutorial schedule is provided, to help tutors “position” their tutorial. The financial details are described. And, the timeline and “next steps” are described.

Dear <Name>:

I am pleased to inform you that the tutorial you proposed about <Subject> has been accepted for presentation at SIGIR'01.

The Tutorials are scheduled for Sunday September 9th. There is a morning session (8:30-12:30) and an afternoon session (1:30-5:30). You should plan on a little more than 3 hours of material. There is a short coffee break, and hopefully lots of questions. Below is a tentative schedule for the tutorials.

Morning:

Introduction to Information Retrieval – Sanderson
Web Information Retrieval – Bharat & Hawking
Multilingual Information Access - Peters & Sheridan
Text Summarization – Radev

Afternoon:

Combining Text- and Link-Based Information – Broder & Raghavan
Text Classification and Text Mining in vivo – Lewis
Designing Search-Sensitive Information Architectures – Hearst
Practical Digital Libraries Overview – Fox

As you may know, the tutorial instructors are paid an honorarium. The financial arrangements are as follows: each TUTORIAL is guaranteed a minimum of \$1000, plus \$50 per attendee above the minimum tutorial size of 20. There is a maximum payment of \$1500, regardless of the number of attendees. NOTE: These amounts are PER TUTORIAL. In addition, each PRESENTER will be automatically registered for the regular conference. No other payments will be made to any presenters, and those who require additional services as part of their conference registration package (such as workshop attendance, or extra dinner tickets) need to pay the extra cost of those services. While we appreciate that in attending the conference presenters can incur costs for travel and accommodation beyond what we are paying by way of honorariums, it is not possible for the conference organisation to provide any support beyond the “conference registration per presenter” and the “per tutorial honorarium”.

We require a minimum of 10 full registrations on each tutorial. Should this number of registrations not be received by the early registration deadline (or sometime shortly thereafter) we will refund any enrolments, and cancel the tutorial. Presenters will also be notified immediately should this be the case; if any tutorial is cancelled there will be no honorarium paid to the presenters of that tutorial, but the presenters will still receive free registration.

Things you need to do:

IMMEDIATELY -

1. Let me know if you agree with the above arrangements.
2. Let me know about scheduling conflicts.
3. Indicate what equipment you require for your tutorial.

LATER -

4. Provide a brief tutorial description and biography of presenters for the advanced program (200 words).
5. I will make copies of tutorial handouts if I get them early. Send me a single clean copy of slides and other materials for distribution to attendees on the day. I must receive them August 20th, at the latest, so we can make copies. [If you do not send them to me by this date, you will be responsible for making copies.] Please make sure that the handouts are easy to read. For example, if you use PowerPoint slides, include only two slides to a page.

Please let me know if I can be of any additional help.

Raya

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Note

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