

COLING/ACL 2006 LOCAL ORGANISERS' REPORT

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1 OVERVIEW

This document provides a brief report on local organisation aspects of COLING/ACL 2006.

It does not cover program-related matters, which are dealt with in the General Chair's report, nor sponsorship, which will be covered also in another report.

In summary, we encountered no major issues in the end, and all the figures (number of registrants, sponsorship and budget) look good.

This report contains some statistics about registration, information about various aspects of the conference, various things which were done differently this year, and some lessons learned.

2 Registration Statistics

A. Conference registration:

We have 654 full delegates, including the complementary registrations (e.g. for the ICCL members, for the sponsors who were entitled to free registrations, and the student volunteers). 337 of these were non-students who registered by the early-bird deadline, and 179 were students who registered by the early-bird deadline.

We also have a number of people attending only single days and some attending only the co-located events (workshops and tutorials).

All in all, we have 738 registrants as of July 3rd, which is a higher number than we had expected.

Workshops and tutorials are quite variable in their

attendance numbers (from 15 registrants to ARTE, to 172 for EMNLP).

B. Dinner: we currently have 358 people signed up for the dinner.

3 SOCIAL EVENTS

We organised several social events:

- A welcoming reception the evening before the main conference, Sunday 16th July. This event includes Aboriginal music.

- The opening session of the conference, on Monday 17th July, will include a short Aboriginal welcoming ceremony.

- The traditional Coling excursion, which is included in the registration cost, is a harbour cruise on Wednesday 19th July. It departs from Circular Quay, crosses the harbour to Taronga Zoo, where we'll alight for morning tea; then, the ferries (there will likely be two: see below) will take attendees to Manly, where lunch can be had and a beach can be sat on. After lunch, we return to Circular Quay via a circuitous route around the harbour, with cocktails (cash bar) at dusk. Those who get tired of cruises quickly can make their own way home mid-cruise by land (or public ferries) from either the zoo or Manly (instructions provided). The nature of the wharf at Taronga means we cannot use a large ferry with sufficient capacity for all attendees, so instead we will be either one or two smaller ferries (each with capacity of 500) depending on number of attendees.

- Poster sessions are being run on the Monday and Tuesday evenings with drinks and nibbles.

- The conference dinner, an opt-in additional cost item at registration, is being held at the Star City casino on Thursday 24th July. The dinner venue is within walking distance, or a short monorail ride, of the conference venue, and has a fantastic view of the harbour.

4 WIRELESS ACCESS

We have negotiated a reasonably-priced wireless access deal that will allow us to provide reasonable access to all registered participants. This has been sponsored by Microsoft.

5 SPONSORSHIP

Sponsorship was difficult but we ended up with the amount we had aimed for, despite the fact that our application for a A\$40k government grant to support the conference was not successful. The organisations to which the two local chairs belong were quite generous in their support.

The sponsorship chairs will have their own report on this issue. A few lessons learned from us:

- Getting sponsorship is increasingly difficult, as there are many competing conferences. It is interesting to note, however, that some conferences (e.g., CHI and SIGIR) are much more successful at attracting sponsors than Coling/ACL. This might be due to the fact that, by tradition, Coling/ACL are very academically oriented.

- Getting a sponsorship chair is difficult (as it is a hard job), and, again, there are competing conferences/events looking for such chairs. We suggest that, in the future, chairs be chosen as early as as possible to avoid conflicts.

- Chasing up sponsors has been difficult, and, in some cases, we still have not received the money. This brings up the suggestion that there should be no advertising for a sponsor (e.g., their logo on the web site) until the money is actually received.

- The sponsorship material needs to be thought of very carefully to ensure equity amongst sponsors (what they get versus what they give).

- We must remember that there is a direct relationship between sponsorship and registration cost (e.g., in our case, every US\$5k in sponsorship brought the registration cost down by US\$10 per person).

- Based on our experiences, we would suggest that the sponsorship issue is one that needs to be thoroughly reviewed for future ACL events.

6 BUDGETS

While we still have to work on the final numbers, our budget is healthy. Our break even point was at 450 paying participants, which we have reached. The registration fee was more than some recent ACLs, and it was reasonably comparable with Coling 2002, held in Taiwan, or even NAACL this year. It should be kept in mind that this conference is a full 4 days (as opposed to 3 days for ACL) and that registration cost includes the Wednesday excursion. (It does, however, leave the conference dinner as an optional extra.)

On our analysis, the registration fee is comparable to other conferences (besides ACL), and cheaper than some (e.g., CHI).

We attempted to firm up the budget numbers (and thus registration costs) as early as possible to give plenty of time for people to plan their trip.

7 MARKETING/ADVERTISING

We set up a website as early as possible, and it was updated periodically with new information. We also used the periodic newsletter as a way to let everyone know what was happening. The issue of printing posters was discussed at length, and, in the end, we produced one and sent it to a mailing list provided by Priscilla.

8 PROCEEDINGS PRODUCTION

Our quotes indicated that printing in Australia would be cheaper than printing in the US and shipping to Australia. This year, however, we made the proceedings an opt-in extra cost on the registration form, with the default provision being the CD-ROM version of the proceedings. This was to save paper and avoid giving people two very large volumes to take home (excluding the companion volumes, another 1000 pages). As the size of the proceedings increases, this seems to be the only viable option. It is interesting to note that only a few people (123) opted for the hard-copy proceedings.

9 New this year

- This year, due to the size of the event, we employed a Professional Conference Organiser (PCO).

We went through a bidding process, interviewed a number of organisations, and chose a small company, Well Done Events, with no flashy brochures or front, but all the experience required. This turned out to be well worth the money. Through the PCO contacts and expertise, we were able to get

better deals with the venue, catering, audio/visual, printing, hotels, etc.

Registration and on-line payment were done through the PCO, and all went smoothly, including chasing up and sorting our various accounts. We were also able to help with visas, through the PCO's contact at the Immigration Office. Finally, the logistics and details were taken care of, also assuring that nothing fell through the cracks. Having a PCO was also extremely useful as we dealt with a commercial venue (as opposed to a university one).

- We tried to have a healthy, environment-friendly and socially aware conference. We thus attempted to have healthy lunch and break food. We also sought to have as little waste as possible (paper/etc.), and to buy whenever possible fair-trade products (e.g., coffee). This turned out to be difficult. We did avoid the printing of proceedings (which many people would leave behind due to the weight) and the PC meeting, which would have meant flying people from all over the world for a week end (also resulting in higher registration fees due to the cost of such a meeting). Our choice for a conference bag is a strong re-usable shopping bag, and our choice for a "conference gift" is useful, small and environmentally friendly.

- Given the lack of paper proceedings this year, we have an expanded "delegate's handbook". It now contains all the abstracts, so that people still have the information they need to decide which talks to attend.

- Besides the newsletter, the PCO sent to all registrants some "quick notes", with various bits of useful information about the conference.

- We are doing our best to collect statistics about a number of things, so that future conference chairs can have some numbers on which to base predictions: for example, this year, we will be counting the number of people in the rooms. We also know how many people asked for a hard copy proceedings. We will do our best to ensure all this information is available for future use.

10 What worked well and what went wrong

Of course, we cannot say yet anything about the success of the conference until after the event and based on the feedback we will receive.

From our perspective, however, we note the following:

- What worked well:

- having a PCO (for the reasons already mentioned above);

- regular meetings involving the local organising chairs and the PCO;
 - regular updates in email with the ACL exec and COLING/ACL;
 - planning as early as possible all the tasks;
 - the newsletters and the quick notes;
 - being able to change one's registration on-line.
- what could have worked better:
- the whole sponsorship process;
 - time line for proceedings (it was very short and involved a mad rush at the end -- thanks to Olivia Kwong, the publication chair, for her work!);
 - student volunteers: the process was started quite late, which meant that the the early bird deadline was passed by the time the student volunteers got chosen. We thus had to have much more email back and forth than really necessary, and ended up having to reimburse students who had been chosen as SVs but had already registered;
 - the Opening speaker: we attempted to have a notable political person to open the conference.

While we started the process quite early, it took time before we received any response, which turned out to be negative. We went through a process of asking other people, and again, getting a response was very slow. We have only secured our opening speaker this week. We recommend to future chairs to take care of this as early in the process as possible, although it is not a crucial aspect of the conference.

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