

ACL 2007 General Chair Report

Firstly, I would like to thank all the people involved with organising ACL this year. All of them carried out their roles to the full, were extremely competent in everything they did, and were responsive and constructive in discussions about any problems that cropped up.

I have thanked them by name in the General Chair Preface in the conference proceedings (and I hope I have not inadvertently left anyone out). So in this report I will only highlight a few issues that warrant some thought for next year, or things that have been done differently than in previous years.

1. Unreliability of email

One tutorial proposal got held up on a mail server and did not reach the tutorials chair -- until he was prompted to look for it by the proposer after the notification date. The problem was resolved by asking the proposer to submit a new version, which was passed for comments to the two reviewers who were most likely to have been given the proposal had it originally been received before the deadline.

Lessons learned: either use *START* for tutorial (and perhaps workshop) proposals, or stick with email submission but add a step to the process "Acknowledgment of receipt" with a published date a couple of days after the submission deadline, so that a proposer knows to expect an acknowledgment and when it should arrive by.

2. Co-location of other, major workshops/conferences

As in previous years, decisions about co-location of major ACL SIG workshops/conferences (e.g. IWPT, EMNLP) have to be taken before those for standard workshops, since their schedules are on a longer timescale. The same goes for workshops that include shared tasks; an example of this is the SIGLEX-sponsored SemEval which submitted a workshop proposal early, before the call for workshops proposals went out.

This year, the discussion about co-location of EMNLP-CoNLL was made harder by the fact that the EMNLP organisers had talked to a number of people connected with ACL 2007 at different points over the previous months, and it took a while to piece together who had said what to whom. I suggest that in future all such communication be directed through the workshops chair (if they have been appointed by then) and the general conference chair.

Another issue is that the EMNLP schedule has a strong interaction with the main conference schedule since EMNLP wants to have their submission deadline at least 1 day after the main conference notification date. This dependency needs to be taken into account at an early stage in planning the conference, otherwise the main conference notification date could end up being too late for EMNLP to manage their submission process.

Another dependency: we set a recommended submission date for workshops to be after the main conference notification date -- so that workshop PCs would not have to deal with submissions that were also under consideration for the main conference.

This year, the only other major conference in our field with a similar reviewing period was AAAI; there were a small number of double submissions which the PC chairs sorted out with their AAAI counterparts.

3. Birds-of-a-feather meetings

Birds-of-a-feather (BoF) meetings are short informal gatherings for researchers with a common interest, often used by SIGs for their business meetings, or for people in new research areas to plan future workshops.

There are several rooms available at ACL 2007 for this purpose, at lunchtimes during the entire conference/workshop stretch. Priscilla Rasmussen has been coordinating requests for BoF meetings and assigning rooms.

4. The reviewing process

There were complaints from the authors of three submissions about the quality of reviews they received. In two cases their complaints had some substance. The authors of one submission compared the ACL reviewing process to that of AAAI, in which authors have an opportunity to write a response to reviewers' comments before acceptance/rejection decisions are made. Future ACL conferences could perhaps consider adopting this model.

5. Workshops

There was an email discussion between the organisers about whether participants should be allowed to register for overlapping workshops; also, how often it happened that people registered for a 2-day workshop and then instead mainly attended 1-day workshops in that 2 day period, thus saving a few dollars in registration fees.

This is probably the first ACL with workshops lasting only half a day. These slots were given either (i) to new, emerging areas which sounded attractive and exciting, but for which it was not clear that there would be sufficient submissions to fill a whole day, or (ii) to more established areas where a similar workshop had run fairly recently so the amount of new research might be limited. This idea needs to be evaluated to see whether it should be tried again in future.

6. Submissions and final versions of papers

The Publications Chair will probably comment on the issues below, but I want to flag them as well:

- * Depending on how they are produced, PDFs can contain embedded information that identifies the authors; this is obviously undesirable for submissions. Perhaps in such cases the START system could be configured to warn submitters and ask them to upload a new version without this information?

- * There were negotiations about the maximum numbers of pages for workshop papers, at submission and for final versions. The previous limit of 8 pages is less valid now that so few hardcopies of workshop proceedings are sold.

- * The requirement for final versions of papers in US letter size caught out many authors. Perhaps the STRRT system could again be customised to check PDFs automatically for page size when they are uploaded?

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