Paper and Proposal Reviews: Is the Process Flawed?

Chair: Hank Korth (Lehigh University)

Panelists: Phil Bernstein (Microsoft)
Mary Fernandez (AT&T Labs–Research)
Le Gruenwald (National Science Foundation)
Phokion Kolaitis (IBM Almaden Research Center)
Kathryn McKinley (University of Texas at...
Motivation

• Recent changes in the way papers and proposals are reviewed to improve
  – Accuracy
  – Fairness
  – Speed / efficiency

• A strong, pervasive impression that, despite (or maybe in part because of) these changes, our review processes have serious problems
Format

• Brief intros (by me)
• Short presentations by each panelist
• Questions and discussion
  – We expect that many of you have valuable insights to share
• We hope our discussion sheds some light on these questions and helps to draw attention to the importance of these issues.
Introductions
Phül Bernstejn

• Microsoft Research, Principal Researcher
  – Affiliate Professor at Univ. of Washington
• CRA Board of Directors, 2001 – present
• VLDB Journal, Editor-in-Chief, 2007 – present
  – Associate editor, 1997 – 2005
• ACM TODS, Associate editor, 1980-89.
• Editorial Boards – Information Systems, WWW Journal, Web Semantics
• PC Chair – VLDB, Snowbird, SIGMOD, PODS
Mary Fernandez

- Author, researcher, research “manager”
  - “Experimentalist”: I build & measure artifacts
- 25+ program committees
  - Mostly DB, some PL & SE
- TODS Associate Editor 2003-06
- SIGMOD Secretary/Treasurer 2005-09
  - Conference publication policies & standards
  - Confer & coordinate with sister conferences & journals
Le Gruenwald

• David W. Franke Professor and Director of the School of Computer Science at the University of Oklahoma
• Program Director, Information Integration and Informatics Cluster, NSF
Phokion G. Kolaitis

• Senior Manager, CS Principles & Methodologies, IBM Almaden Research Center

• Current Editorial Board Service:
  – ACM TODS: Associate Editor
  – Annals of Pure & Applied Logic: Managing Editor
  – J. Logic & Computation, Theory of Computing Systems, IJFCS: Editorial Board Member

• Past PC Chair and General Chair:
  – ACM Principles of Database Systems (PODS)
Kathryn McKinley  
The University of Texas at Austin

• An experimental computer scientist in the area of programming language implementation (SIGPLAN, SIGARCH)
• 40+ program committees
• Program Chair  
• TOPLAS Editor-in-chief
M. Tamer Öztu

- Director, Cheriton School of Computer Science, University of Waterloo, Canada
- SIGMOD Chair (2001-2005), VLDB Endowment Board Member (1996-2002), ACM Publications Board Member (2002-present)
- EIC, VLDB Journal (1997-2005); Associate Editor, ACM Computing Surveys (2004-present), Editorial Boards of 4 journals (past and present)
- PC Chair: VLDB, ICDE, CIKM, WISE and 6 others
Hank Korth

• Chair, Dept of Computer Science and Eng. at Lehigh University
• Associate Editor, ACM TODS
  – Participated in a long deliberation that led to TODS adopting a double-blind review policy
• Past editorial roles include VLDB Journal, Journal of Cooperative Information Systems, SIGMOD Record, PC chair roles (SIGMOD and PDIS), 43 program committees
Presentations by our Panelists

- Kathryn
- Le
- Phil
- Phokion
- Mary
- Tamer
Some Questions

• Is it really good to value conference papers more than journal papers?
  – Is it a reaction to slowness of journals
  – Or a tolerance of superficiality over thoroughness and precision?

• Are conferences now perhaps less places to go to learn or simply surrogates for tenure committees?
More questions

• Are our experimental results meaningful, believable, statistically valid, repeatable?
• Are online PCs good enough for quality reviews given the level at which we value conference publication?
Apparent trends

• More double blind reviewing, no reversals back to single-blind
• High paper volume means some 2\textsuperscript{nd} tier conferences become 1\textsuperscript{st} tier
• Several subdisciplines have conferences that are now \textit{more} prestigious than journals
• Some (many?) schools have internalized the concept of conference pubs \geq journal pubs
• Concern about delta versus innovative papers
• Author response