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Meeting: Fall Meeting of the ICAPS Council  
Date: November 17, 2015

Online meeting done through GoToMeeting

Meeting is recorded and available: recording time 50:57 minutes

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Attendees:

Chris Beck  
Blai Bonet  
Ronen Brafman  
Amanda Coles  
Andrew Coles  
Carmel Domshlak  
Patrik Haslum  
Malte Helmert  
Dan Magazzeni  
Wheeler Ruml  
Scott Sanner  
Brian Williams  
Shlomo Zilberstein

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Agenda

0 - 45 minutes: Conference Chair discussion  
    0 - 20 minutes: lessons learned and suggestions from 2015 (Ronen & Carmel)  
    20 - 45 minutes: Q&A from 2016 (Andrew & Dan)  
45 - 90 minutes: Program Chair discussion  
    45 - 65 minutes: lessons learned and suggestions from 2015 (Patrik & Shlomo)  
    65 - 90 minutes: Q&A from 2016 (Amanda, Stefan, Scott)

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Conference chairs ICAPS 2015: Lessons learned and suggestions

Carmel: Initial discussion about sponsorship. How to get money and make the best use of it. In 2015, the money arrived at the end and the chairs took some risks.

IDEA: Council can provide some backup money to organizers (specially for student activities). It is expected that the money is returned but if the conference cannot do it, it shouldn't be a big deal. That is, it is not a pre-allowance or loan. It is something different.

A policy for implementing this idea is required because the council should not run out of money in the long term.

Chris: In Jerusalem, the council gave 10k of additional funding for students.

Dan: 2016 knew about this decision. Dan agrees with the idea for 2016. The sponsorship chairs are already working on getting funding. There will be a summer school in 2016.

Carmel: There is also an issue about video recording.

Ronen: One of the biggest headaches was generating the program and booklet. Suggestion for next ICAPS: to have some type of templates for generating the booklet. There are lots of information that come from different sources: different chairs (workshop, tutorial, demos), technical program, and other activities.

Dan: Is this a problem of merging information? Is that it?

Ronen: It is more than that. If you want to have a nice program (booklet), then you need to integrate, design the booklet, make it look nice. It is a long process.

Blai: If we use the electronic guide (e.g. Guidebook), the problem disappears. You have another problem, though. The problem of who is going to upload the information, set up the App.

Ronen: I do not use the electronic guide. But, yes there is always a problem of integrating the information.

Chris: Is it right to force all participants to bring a smart phone?

Carmel: Electronic version is good but I get lost in it. I prefer printed version. I don't think the electronic version is a complete substitute of printed version.

Malte: Whatever is done (electronic or printed), knowledge must be passed from one year to another year so that the new chairs don't have to do everything from scratch.

Carmel: Can't be done easily. In 2015, the booklet was done by a designer and the template cannot be passed. It is a graphical thing not like a LaTeX template.

Wheeler: In 2014, booklet was done with Google Docs in a very simple format.

Dan: We are not worried about this issue yet.

Chris: There is an idea for making a template. Let's see if something can be passed from 2016 to 2017.

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Q&A from 2016

Dan: We have some initiatives to have better interactions w/ robotics community. Some proposal from Erez Karpas to have interactions between ICAPS and RoboCup. Additionally, we extended the deadline for workshop submission to let people have more time between notification of technical track and workshops. We are doing good for the moment.

Andrew: No more questions.

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Program chairs ICAPS 2015: Lessons learned and suggestions

Shlomo: In terms of the PC, everything should be in place already for 2017. We already provided a lot of information. We found useful to have all the main notification messages (not only acceptance/notification messages) but also invitations, etc. done in advance.

Scott: We are keeping a record of all messages.

Shlomo: If you want, we can provide all the messages we used.

Shlomo: There was a discussion about the acceptance rates. Should we worry about the acceptance rates between the tracks? Should there be a target acceptance rate? Should we talk about this?

Scott: I am curious about this. We have a clear upper bound on this to maintain

the quality. Do we need a consistent acceptance rate across tracks? Is it enough to have an overall cap?

Shlomo: This is my thought. It is fine to have different acceptance rates, but acceptance rates should be communicated. One approach is to communicate acceptance rates per track and not globally. However, if there are very small tracks, it does not make sense to separate such acceptance rates from others. In this case, the very small tracks can be lumped together track or to the main track. When having different acceptance rates in significant tracks, I don't like the idea of reporting a single acceptance rate for the whole conference. It is a decision to make. It is not an ICAPS policy.

Chris: So, to understand, it is not a discussion about having different acceptance rates but on how to report them.

Shlomo: A common issue is that as the deadline for notification approaches, there are always borderline papers and a decision must be made on them. With separated tracks, the decision on borderline papers is not uniform across tracks.

Patrik: It is better to have a target acceptance range instead of having a target acceptance number.

Shlomo: In 2015, we use a target acceptance range. It is up to the council whether to make this policy or not, and if so, what should be that range.

Wheeler: It also depend on the stamina of the PC and reviewers to differentiate papers into classes.

Chris: Traditionally, we have no policy on providing such a range to PCs. I prefer to give PCs freedom to decide on these issues. The general idea is to let PC to see the history of acceptance rates and let them decide.

Amanda: I agree on having freedom about adjusting the acceptance rate in terms of the quality of the received papers.

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Q&A from 2016

Scott: Question about papers from chairs. We will have some papers from chairs. In some cases, chairs submitting papers to other tracks, and in some cases, submitting papers to the track they chair. The current view is that if the track chair submit to a different track, that paper is handled as a regular papers. Is everybody Ok with this?

Patrik: This is what we did.

Wheeler: If you are doing that, track chairs should have complete control about threshold and acceptance criteria over borderline papers.

Scott: The more trickier case is for chairs that submit to their own track. First thing is that EasyChair (EC) will not allow such chairs to see such papers because there is a conflict. There are more concerns on the decision making side. Track chairs know each other well. An idea is that the other track chair chooses a strong lead reviewer for such a paper and commits to the decision of the lead reviewer. The final decision for that paper is not on the chairs but on the lead reviewer.

Brian: In Brazil, we did exactly that. Those papers we managed outside the system (EC) and everything went alright. As long as you have a strong lead reviewer and give s/he full autonomy (even to recruit the reviewers), everything should be fine.

Blai: What happens if such a paper is borderline, and there are other borderline papers as well. You may not be able to accept/reject all borderline papers because getting off the target acceptance range (or number). So, some difficult decision may be needed.

Scott: When a track chair paper is borderline, that paper should be the first to be rejected. But Amanda may have another opinion.

Amanda: Yes, if a borderline paper is clearly stronger than another borderline paper, why it should be rejected instead of the other.

Andrew: If you trust the chairs for making the final decisions, then it should be ok to let chairs decide such cases and not get involved.

Amanda: Maybe we should ask the lead reviewer to make a final call on the paper.

Malte: We already had this discussion in the Council. The outcome was that chairs must decide the process themselves. We had such cases in the past. The real answer is that we don't know what is the best solution, or if such solution really exist. I think you can't go with the lead reviewer decision. For making a decision on borderline papers, you need to see the whole picture, and the lead reviewer doesn't have such a view.

Scott: We realize this is a sensitive issue and we'll be as careful as possible in these cases.

Brian: For me it is reasonable to think that the bar is higher for the chairs (even when there are students involved). If the paper is really in dispute, let the paper go to the next year.

Scott: I tend to agree.

Scott: Final question. Dan mentioned about posters from AAAI/IJCAI.

Dan: The idea is to offer people that had planning or related papers in AAAI/IJCAI, to have them posters in ICAPS about such papers. The idea is to have more visibility on planning.

Scott: Will we have another call or by invitation?

Dan: We thought about another call.

Shlomo: For most people that doesn't have a direct participation in ICAPS, coming to the conference just to present a poster may not be justified. I'm skeptical about the success of this call. Also, it requires more resources, including people and space in the program.

Patrik: If you have a poster sessions, adding a few more posters is not a problem for the program, but yes, I agree with Shlomo's comment. Suggest to put call for this very very late so only people that is already going to the conference, we'll have this opportunity. In this way, less stress is created.

Amanda: Yes, I don't see space problems since we'll have a poster session.

Scott: Was there something really horrible or unexpected that you want to warn us about now?

Shlomo: We had a lot of pressure at the end, but we were in the special situation of having half-day joint session with SoCS. That took a lot of time and coordination, and put a lot of pressure.

Scott: After notifications went out, how horrible were the complaints about rejections?

Patrik: They were not too bad. There were only about 4 of them. Most cases it was just the case of clarifying that the process is competitive and thus the final decision is not only about the quality of the paper but how it compares with other papers.

Patrik: One thing that the reviewers assignment is not that good as I thought before. I don't have any suggestion on how to do this better. We started assigning reviewers by maximizing bids, but Shlomo can comment on this.

Shlomo: In a relative small community like ICAPS, we are at the level that is feasible to do a manual assignment. We had the lead reviewers model. We want each paper to have at least one person that is at least a real expert on that area. Besides that, I found the bid information useful when trying to find the additional reviewers. We tried to follow the bids and it wasn't that hard.

Patrik: The EC automatic assignment is not that good in satisfying the bids from reviewers. We did manually.

Blai: EC assignment is flaky. You can play with it but don't press the button on the first assignment it generates. You need to study it. For AAAI-15, we did the assignment outside the system. We developed a software for this. The assignment is a linear scan of the papers. In the first pass, you assign only using bids. In the second pass, you solve the missing reviews. In a conference like ICAPS, the assignment can be done entirely manual, without any software.

Malte: On thing that happens to me recently, more than once, is that I get papers together with people that I work with. In some cases, there were papers where all 3 reviewers were from Basel. There are two problems with that. First, it is hard to argue with your boss. That's one thing. Often you get 3 times the same opinion because all the reviewers work together and may have the same vision of the paper. That is something that may be happening quite frequently. Two out of three reviewers is not so bad, but three out of three is bad.

Scott: We plan on optimizing the reviewer assignment. We have 3 co-chairs for the program so things may be easier on us this year.

Dan: One more question. I am chairing a planning workshop at AAAI with Scott and Sylvie. We notice people submit papers to the workshop and plan to submit to ICAPS. Is there an issue with this?

Shlomo: This is not a problem.

Blai: Any restriction from AAAI?

Dan: No.

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End of meeting