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SIGCHI Local Chapters in 2014

Interest and need for HCI all over the world, especially in the vast developing world, has been growing recently. Local communities affiliated with SIGCHI—the SIGCHI local chapters—gather together HCI students, academics, and practitioners from their specific regions. In 2014, SIGCHI has 40 local chapters in 24 countries on six continents, reaching more than 3,000 chapter members.

Last year, SIGCHI chapters were started in Chile and Israel. The latest additions to the charter of SIGCHI chapters are the Rochester Institute of Technology Student Chapter (NY), Wananchi (“citizen/common man” in Swahili) in Kenya, and Indonesia ACM SIGCHI.

We have learned that running a chapter on a fully voluntary basis is not an easy task. In particular, we see problems when the chapter is young and the volunteers feel they have to start and drive the whole enterprise. SIGCHI has also not been highly successful in promoting the benefits of being affiliated with an international network of multidisciplinary and multicultural HCI professionals and peers.

SIGCHI chapters with long histories, such as BostonCHI and BayCHI, have no issues with financial stability and sponsor relationships. At

the other end of the spectrum, small chapters just beginning their activities are often trying to survive with volunteer work, without any income from membership fees.

In addition, the membership distributions vary significantly. Some chapters are lacking in academic members, whereas others are lacking in practitioners. Depending on this distribution, the activities of the chapters can be very different—the member benefits valued by practitioners probably differ from those valued by academics. For several years now we have tried to develop real benefits for our chapters that make their affiliation with SIGCHI worthwhile. The challenge, as we have learned, is that universal benefits are hard to find.

Our current approach for supporting chapters is to enable closer interactions between the chapters. We host an annual Chapters Workshop at CHI and have learned that inter-chapter communications and collaboration could help the chapters overcome their problems. We could organize more workshops, but even better, we should support chapter-initiated interactions, because surely the chapters know best what their needs are. This support could mean, for example, enabling joint

events, summer schools, speaker tours, volunteer exchange, common student competitions and job lists, or video sharing from chapter events. Following this idea, the SIGCHI Executive Committee has decided to offer funding to chapter-networking projects. An excellent example of this type of event is the Nordic SIGCHI Chapters Event on October 16 at NordiCHI 2014.

For the developing parts of the world, additional support can be offered—an annual award for a design challenge or similar competition, student scholarships, and community-building events. A recent example of such an event was the UX Indonesia-Malaysia 2014 workshop held in Jakarta last April, which already gave birth to a new SIGCHI local chapter in the region.

In some parts of the world, the legitimacy of HCI as a field of science and a profession is still questioned. As one counter-measure, the SIGCHI EC is currently trying to find volunteers around the world for the development of the “living curriculum” for HCI education. Local chapter representatives and members are invited to take part in this global effort.

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