News from the SIGs

by Ellen Walker
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In this issue of News from the SIGs, we present news from SIGCSE and SIGITE. Amber Settle, Chair of SIGCSE discusses the benefits of SIGCSE for practitioners and highlights some resources. Steven Zilora reflects on the growth and maturity of SIGITE as he completes his term as chair.

*From our SIGCSE reporter and
SIGCSE chair, Amber Settle.*

There has been a recent push by the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) leadership to evaluate whether ACM Special Interest Groups (SIG), events, and services are meeting the needs of computer science practitioners. Prior to a recent SIG Governing Board (SGB) meeting, SIG leaders were asked to describe how they address the needs of practitioners and in answering the questions I had an interesting revelation. SIGCSE's practitioners not only include people in industry focused on training and education, but also academics whose research interests lie elsewhere, the very people who make up all the other SIGs under the ACM umbrella. That's in part why I found the presentations made by SIGCAS, SIGGRAPH, SIGHPC, SIGCHI, SIGITE, and SIGPLAN at the 2018 Symposium to be so exciting, as cross-SIG activities will help SIGCSE to achieve the goal of reaching computer science education practitioners.

We don't need to go outside SIGCSE, however, to find practitioners. Many SIGCSE members aren't active in computer science education research, either because their research interests lie in some

subspecialty in computer science or another discipline or because research isn't their main professional focus. One of the benefits of SIGCSE conferences and events is that people who aren't as interested in research find ideas, techniques, and approaches that can be directly applied in their classrooms. In fact, I would argue that CS Ed researchers in the SIGCSE community are also regularly computer science education practitioners. Many SIGCSE presentations and articles provide information that may not feed a CS Ed researcher's agenda but instead inform and inspire their teaching. In my view the blurring between researchers and practitioners in the SIGCSE community is one of our strengths.

Of course, the first step in finding something innovative to help you in the classroom is to reach out and search for it. SIGCSE conferences are a great place to do this, but SIGCSE has roughly 2700 members and yet only has approximately 1850 attendees between its three conferences. For those reading this article who don't attend a SIGCSE conference regularly, I suggest that you use your ACM Digital Library access to SIGCSE publications to your advantage. Previous conferences provide a wealth of information on teaching nearly every topic in computer science.

While it likely seems daunting to consider adopting some of the

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innovative curricula that you can find discussed in SIGCSE venues, I would argue that smaller changes can have an impact on SIGCSE members' classrooms. I'm a fan of Lecia Barker's work, and one of her papers [1] that has influenced me is *Making Visible the Behaviors that Influence Learning Environment: A Qualitative Exploration of Computer Science Classrooms*. In that work they rigorously examine the practices in computer science classrooms that hinder collaborative and supportive learning environ-

ments and make concrete suggestions about how those practices can be changed. One of the things they suggest is that instructors learn and use students' names to remove barriers between students and instructors, and it's something that I do devotedly in my classroom.

I urge you in the next month to go to the ACM Digital Library, do a search on a computer science education topic you teach, and see if you can't find something that you could do differently that would improve your classroom. It doesn't have to be a big change since small changes like learning names can make a difference. If the idea of doing a literature search is too daunting, go visit Colleen Lewis' CS Teaching Tips site [2]. She has a wealth of information available and has nicely addressed many issues of adoption. The important part is to celebrate the computer science education practitioner inside you and make your students' lives just a little bit better for it.

*From Steve Zilora,
our SIGITE reporter.*

Three years have gone by quickly. Next month someone new will take over as SIGITE chair. As I look back on these past few years I can outline some significant growth and maturity in SIGITE. We are in a great position financially and have begun to put that to good use.

This past year we were one of the relatively few SIGs who supported the 150th Turing Award celebration. We also awarded more student scholarships for attendance at our annual conference than in years past. The

executive committee also authorized an expansion of this program.

Our conference activities have also matured. We've established a standing conference committee to ensure good continuity from year to year and seek ways to improve our conference planning and execution. Our ad hoc submission committee is one example of what can be achieved when a group of us come together to address a specific issue. In their first year, the committee effected a 20% increase in submissions to the annual conference.

And that brings me to one of my greatest experiences as SIGITE Chair. I have continually been overwhelmed by the enthusiasm and generosity of SIGITE members. We may be one of the smallest SIGs, and that sometimes limits what we can do, but our size also works to our advantage. Annual conferences are like a homecoming and each time I sent out a call to action, I received two to three times the number of volunteers I hoped for. I cannot overstate how gratifying that experience is when you're trying to lead a volunteer organization.

And while the entire SIGITE membership is a great group of people, I must single out a few of them for individual recognition. Rob Friedman and Richard Helps have been great fellow officers of the SIG. There have been many times, especially in the first year or two when I needed their advice. They were always very responsive and very thoughtful in their counsel. I want to particularly single out Rick Homkes, our treasurer and secretary. I could write an entire column on the work he has done for the SIG, but I could not begin to convey what a help he has been. His organization, his understanding of issues,

his foresight, and his mid-western common sense were invaluable to me. I truly hope he gets re-involved in SIGITE leadership.

I am looking forward to continuing to serve SIGITE as past-chair for the next three years, helping however I can. Thank you to all the SIGITE members for the great experience I have had. For more information on these SIGs, see the following websites. ♦

SIGCSE: www.sigcse.org

SIGITE: www.sigite.org

SIGMIS: www.sigmis.org

References

1. Barker, L.J. and Garvin-Doxas, K. Making Visible the Behaviors that Influence Learning Environment: A Qualitative Exploration of Computer Science Classrooms. *Computer Science Education*, 14, 2 (2004), 119-145; <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/08993400412331363853>. Accessed 2018 March 18.
2. Lewis, C. CS Teaching Tips; <http://csteachingtips.org/>. Accessed 2018 February 10.

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