News from the SIGs

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In this issue of News from the SIGs, we present a discussion of issues surrounding gender from SIGCSE board chair Amber Settle.

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

In the past 18 months, issues surrounding gender have come to a head in the public sphere in many countries. Harassment, pay inequality, discrimination, and a host of other long-standing problems have jumped into the headlines, and the reactions have felt more measured and serious than in the past. The Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) and its Special Interest Groups (SIGs) are no exception to this. Of course, gender is simply one aspect of diversity and inclusion, and I suspect that there are many other dimensions along which SIGCSE could potentially improve. But for the sake of this article, I will concentrate on gender.

In July 2017, ACM rolled out a new discrimination policy for its events, and in September 2017 SIGARCH (the SIG for computer architecture) began a public process of examining harassment and discrimination in their community. I encourage you to read the blog posts that resulted from the SIGARCH efforts [1,2]. The information out of the SIGARCH community has prompted other SIGs and ACM to consider how widespread harassment and discrimination may be in our

communities. One of the first steps that many SIG leaders are taking is to understand how their communities fare when it comes to female representation among SIG leadership, conference leadership, and conference and journal publications. Starting to answer these questions for SIGCSE inspired this article.

To begin with SIGCSE has one of the highest percentages of female membership among all the SIGs, with 25.29%. Only SIGDOC (38.89%), SIG-ACCESS (37.82%), SIGUCCS (34.82%), and SIGCAS (26.65%) have a larger percentage of female members. That said, SIGCSE can certainly do better. Attendance at the 2018 SIGCSE Technical Symposium was 42% female, so there is clearly room for improvement in our membership numbers.

In some areas SIGCSE truly excels in terms of female representation. Between 1997 and the present, 65% of the SIGCSE Board has been female. I should note, however, that this is skewed by the past two SIGCSE Boards. The 2013-2016 and 2016-2019 Boards have had only one man each, giving 88% female representation. (I feel the need to note that the slates for both elections were gender balanced). However, even excluding those Boards, female SIGCSE Board representation since 1997 is at 58%. The SIGCSE membership has consistently demonstrated a willingness to elect female candidates.

Also encouraging is the female

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representation among SIGCSE Technical Symposium chairs. Between 1997 and 2020 (the last year for which chairs have been chosen), 49% of the Symposium chairs have been female. This is no accident, however. At least since 2010, and likely much longer, SIGCSE Boards have encouraged nominations of one man and one woman to co-chair the conference. A view of the records shows that even when one person chaired the conference, the gender of the chairs mostly alternated.

However, the other two SIGCSE conferences also commonly have female leadership. Since 1996 (when it was founded) the Innovation in

SIGCSE Board from left: Susan Rodger, Mark Allen Weiss, Adrienne Decker, Briana B. Morrison, Judy Sheard, Sue C. Fitzgerald, Leo Porter (SIGCSE Bulletin), Michelle Craig, and Amber Settle.

Technology Education (ITiCSE) Conference chairs have been 37% female. And since 2005 (when it was founded) the International Computing Education (ICER) Workshop chairs have been 28% female. The models for these conferences are different than the Symposium, and leaders are chosen in part due to geographical constraints. In any case, SIGCSE female conference leadership exceeds current female SIGCSE membership.

The prominence of women in service roles for SIGCSE has also produced high numbers for the SIGCSE service award. Since 1997 when it was created, there have been seven (out of 23) female winners for the Lifetime Service to the Computer Science Education Community Award, which is 30% of the total. Less encouraging is the 17% female representation among the winners of the Outstanding Contribution to Computer Science Education Award. That percentage holds both for the entire existence of the award (since 1981) as well as since 1997 for comparison to the 30% for Lifetime Service Award.

One area that I have not explored due to time constraints is female representation among Symposium, ITiCSE, and ICER conference and program committees. Another unanswered question, in part because I have no idea how it would be done retroactively and at scale, is what the female representation among SIGCSE conference authors is. ACM has begun to put processes in place to gather this data for all of its SIGs, but information gathering also places authors' privacy at risk which is a serious concern. Additionally, it would not be appropriate to address this issue in a way that compromises existing blind review processes.

Before we can begin to improve the diversity and inclusion in our community we need to understand where we currently stand, and in a manner that does not risk privacy or other important rights that members of our community expect. I have more questions than answers on how we can get there, and I hope that if you have ideas you'll share them with me.

For more information on these SIGs, see the following websites ❖

SIGCSE: www.sigcse.org

SIGITE: www.sigite.org

SIGMIS: www.sigmis.org

References

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