

AAAI News



Winter News from the Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence

Join Us for AAAI-16 and IAAI-16 in Sunny Phoenix!

The Thirtieth AAAI Conference on Artificial Intelligence (AAAI-16) and the Twenty-Eighth Conference on Innovative Applications of Artificial Intelligence (IAAI-16) will be held February 12–17 at the Phoenix Convention Center, Phoenix, Arizona, USA. Phoenix is the gateway to the Grand Canyon, and its history is a testament to the spirit of puebloans, ranchers, miners, and visionaries. Nearby Tempe is the site of Arizona State University, home of a leading AI research community. For local information, please visit the Phoenix Visitors site at www.visit-phoenix.com.

Registration Is Open!

AAAI-16 Registration is now available at aaai.org/aaai16, and online registration can be completed at regonline.com/aaai16. Complete tutorial and workshop information, as well as other special program information is available at these sites.

Make Your Hotel Reservation!

AAAI has reserved a block of rooms at the Hyatt Regency Phoenix at reduced conference rates. The cut-off date for conference rate reservations is Friday, January 22, 2016 at 5:00pm Phoenix time. Please see www.aaai.org/Conferences/AAAI/2016/aaai16hotel.php for complete information.

Invited Presentations

Thomas G. Dietterich, AAAI President,

will kick off the main conference with his Presidential Address on Sunday, February 14. The Robert S. Engelmore Award talk will be given by Reid Smith (i2k Connect). The joint AAAI-16/IAAI-16 invited speaker will be Demis Hassabis (Google DeepMind), and additional talks will be given by Andreas Krause (ETH Zurich), Susan Murphy (University of Michigan), and Naveen Rao (Nervana Systems). A special panel on AI and Labor and one on Autonomous Flight will also be held.

Students Activities

As part of the outreach to students in 2016, AAAI-16 will continue several special programs specifically for students, including the Doctoral Consortium, the Student Abstract Program, Lunch with a Fellow, and the Volunteer Program, in addition to the Student Newcomer Reception and the AI Open House.

Student Newcomer Lunch

AAAI will follow the very successful 2015 Student Newcomer Lunch with an evening student reception on Friday, February 12, designed to welcome first-time students to the conference and give them an opportunity to meet other participants before the launch of the main conference.

AAAI-16 AI Open House

The AAAI-16 AI Open House will be held Saturday, February 13, for high-school students in the Phoenix area, the general public, graduate and undergraduate students, and established AI researchers. The latest work

in many areas of AI will be showcased.

Breakfast with Champions: A Women's Mentoring Event

AAAI will hold its second women's mentoring event between women students and senior women in CS/AI. Breakfast with Champions will be held Monday morning, February 15.

Robotics!

In addition to the continuation of the Robotics Exhibition and Robotics Fellowship programs, AAAI-16 will feature invited talks from robotics researchers, including a plenary talk from a recent Robotics: Science and Systems Early Career Spotlight speaker, and a special session featuring 10 RSS 2015 papers judged to be both of very high standard, and of special interest to the AAAI community.

Robotics Exhibition

Research groups and robotics companies will participate in the AAAI Robotics Exhibition, demonstrating robot systems to a large audience of artificial intelligence researchers (and beyond!). The Exhibition will span the AAAI-16 Open House program on Saturday, February 13 through Tuesday, February 16. The open house will be open to high-school students and other selected members of the general public. Demonstrations that highlight progress that has been made in robotics in the past five years will be featured.

Robotics Fellowships

PhD students from robotics labs that

do not typically publish at artificial intelligence (AI) venues will attend AAAI-16 and learn about AI techniques of relevance to robotics. The students will give short talks in a dedicated session about their dissertation topics and be provided with a variety of opportunities to interact with artificial intelligence students and senior researchers throughout the conference.

For more information on Robotics at AAAI-16, please see www.aaai.org/Conferences/AAAI/2016/aaai16robot-exhibit.php.

AAAI Executive Council Meeting Minutes

The AAAI Executive Council was held January 26, 2015, in Austin, Texas, USA

Attending: Tom Dietterich, Subbarao Kambhampati, Manuela Veloso, Ted Senator, Sonia Chernova, Vincent Conitzer, Boi Faltings, Carla Gomes, Julia Hirschberg (by skype), Eduard Hovy, Sven Koenig, David Leake, Henry Lieberman, Francesca Rossi, Stephen Smith, Sylvie Thiebaux, Toby Walsh, Brian C. Williams, Shlomo Zilberstein

President Tom Dietterich called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM, and welcomed the members of the Council to the annual in-person meeting.

The minutes of the previous two meetings in July 2014 and November 2015 had been submitted to the Council previously for review prior to the meeting. Ted Senator moved to have them approved and Ed Hovy seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous in favor of approving the minutes.

Ted Senator, Secretary-Treasurer, briefly reviewed the three duties of non-profit boards, including the duties of care, loyalty, and obedience, and referred people to the handouts that he had previously circulated about these and other important pointers.

Standing Committee Reports

Finance: Ted Senator reviewed the names of the current members of the Finance Committee, and thanked them for their help during the past year. He noted that the Council had adopted a new budgeting process in the past year, whereby committees took a more active role in the budget-

ing process, including review of the departmental budget for their committees and a council-wide discussion of the budget before adoption before the beginning of the fiscal year. Senator reported that the investment portfolio had increased by 6.6 percent in the past year, and that the association withdrew \$100,000 from the portfolio during the year. The current procedure is to rebalance the portfolio once per year or if any one fund moves off the targeted percentage by more than 5 percent.

Awards/Fellows: Manuela Veloso thanked the members of the Awards Committee, and noted that it is often difficult to find people to serve on this committee, as well as the Fellows Selection Committee. Veloso instituted a new method of evaluating the Fellows nominations, assigning a principal reviewer for each nomination. The committee ultimately selected five new Fellows. The Awards Committee oversaw the selection of the senior members, the Classic Paper Award, and the Distinguished Service Award. Eleven new senior members were chosen, and Ken Ford was selected for the Distinguished Service Award. The committee also recognized one paper for the Classic Paper Award (Eugene Charniak: Statistical Parsing with a Context-Free Grammar and Word Statistics), and one for honorable mention (Roberto Bayardo and Robert Schrag: Using CSP Look-Back Techniques to Solve Real-World SAT Instances.) Veloso asked the Council to encourage people to apply for senior member status, as it is a recognized honor in universities and industry. Fellows and senior members attending the conference receive special ribbons to identify them. A separate committee, which has a rotating membership, oversaw the selection of the Feigenbaum Prize, which was given to Eric Horvitz of Microsoft Research. Veloso noted that new nominations are needed for the Feigenbaum Prize, which will be awarded again in 2017.

Conference Outreach: Henry Lieberman reviewed the list of conferences receiving conference cooperation and noted that this status could be offered to many more conferences. However, the committee needs help identifying appropriate conferences, especially in

the mathematics area. As part of their outreach effort, the committee would like to see a AAAI women's group established, as well as one for other underrepresented groups. Julia Hirschberg suggested that the women's group could establish programs held each year at AAAI and IJCAI that would attract more women to the conference. Hirschberg and Veloso will follow up with CRA-W for possible cooperation and colocation opportunities.

International: Toby Walsh, chair of the International Committee, noted that the committee had concentrated their recent discussions on where to focus their efforts. The membership Committee has focused on the interest from China and India, and Walsh would like to expand those efforts to other areas, specifically on the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), as well as Iran, Turkey, and Australia). Special emphasis will be put on students who will form the AI researchers of the future. One important component of this effort will be the establishment of deeply discounted memberships rates (\$20-30, depending on the country). In addition, forming liaisons with regional and national conferences will be critical in making people aware of AAAI and its programs. Supporting student travel to these events would be an excellent way to raise awareness of AAAI's mission. Expansion of the Fellows student outreach program (lunch with a fellow) to these conferences, or supporting student events (breakfasts, doctoral consortia) would be excellent ways to support international students. Finally, holding smaller conferences, such as HCOMP and ICWSM in international venues would signal AAAI's commitment to the international AI community.

The Council discussed the international committee's membership dues proposal more fully as part of the Membership Report. As an initial step in reaching out to international communities, the Council concurred that expanding the international committee to include more Chinese and Indian members is important. Kambhampati will follow up with names of potential members. The Council also suggested that the committee encour-

age the establishment of chapters or affiliated groups in these areas, as well as asking the organizers of the Chinese chapter to better publicize the chapter there. Walsh will follow up on this.

Membership: Ed Hovy reported on the Membership Committee's extensive analysis of the current membership, the membership dues structure, and their proposal for reducing the membership fee. The formal proposal for a reduced membership in China and India was as follows:

Basic membership: \$100

Reduction for student member: -\$50

Reduction for people residing in India and China (to be expanded to other countries later): -\$20

Reduction for longer-term memberships: -\$10/yr

Fixed rate for library members in those countries: \$285 (+\$10 for additional online access)

The committee proposed that the structure be applied for a two-year period, and reevaluated after that time. If there is no significant increase in membership from these two countries and the initiative results in a significant loss of income, the Executive Council can revoke the new dues structure at any time.

The effort to attract more international members has been a shared goal of the international and membership committees. Walsh encouraged the Council to take a larger risk by further discounting the membership dues, especially in China and India, where there are large research and student populations. Rao Kambhampati noted that the Council should bring dues down to the \$20 level in these countries. The Council agreed that having a larger international membership was a primary goal, but that the involvement of local researchers in these countries was crucial. In addition, it is important to expand the value proposition for AAAI membership, and Hovy asked the Council to think about concrete ways to do this.

After a brief discussion, a new proposal was put before the Council. The proposal called for a special reduced rate of \$20 for regular members and \$18 for student members residing in countries that have been listed on the ACM website as having weak currency. Participating countries should form a

committee of five people who will be the liaison to researchers in their area, and provide information back to the membership and international committees about possible additions to the AAAI value proposition. The initiative will be reviewed annually, and also will receive a formal review in 3 years. Ed Hovy made a motion to accept the proposal, which was seconded by Rao Kambhampati. The proposal passed unanimously with one abstention.

In addition, the Membership Committee will craft a membership drive to publicize updated an value proposition, as well as the initiative to expand internationally.

Symposium: Brian Williams reported that the 2014 Fall Symposium was well attended, especially due to the HRI symposium, which attracted a large group. The upcoming Spring Symposium is also expected to have a healthy attendance. Williams noted that it may be necessary to be creative to retain interest in the symposia, now that AAAI and IJCAI are held six months apart. The committee has been considering a number of things, including a masters series, which would be an immersive, invited group. They have also been considering shortening the series to two days and changing the timing of the two events. There was some enthusiasm for having the two series in June and November, or just one in Washington, DC in May.

Publications: David Leake reported on the themes of the upcoming *AI Magazine* issues, including AI in Space and AI in Big Data. He asked the Council to encourage others to submit ideas for special issues and articles. The AAAI Press continues to produce numerous proceedings and over 20 annual technical reports for AAAI and AAAI-affiliated conferences and workshops, as well as the hard copy of JAIR. The AAAI conference proceedings will be over 5,000 pages in six volumes, breaking the record for the second straight year.

Conference: Shlomo Zilberstein thanked Sven Koenig, Blai Bonet, and all the members of the AAAI-15/IAAI-15 organizing committee for their huge efforts and generous donations of time in making AAAI-15 such an enormous success. (In a unanimous vote, the entire Council voted to formally

thank the program chairs as well!) In light of the record number of submissions and the large attendance, the initial consensus was that the move to the North American winter timeframe has been a success. This success not only presents big challenges for the organizers, but also tremendous opportunities. Koenig and Bonet introduced many new innovations in 2015 and extended the organizing committee to help get all the programs in place. The Conference Committee used the results of the 2014 conference survey to help shape some of these, and another survey will be conducted in 2015.

A few specific issues were discussed, including the spate of ethical violations that has begun to crop up with submissions. In addition to plagiarism issues, some authors have added new authors to submissions at the time of publication. In at least one case, this was unauthorized, and resulted in the withdrawal of the paper. Several practical suggestions were made, such as creating an institutional memory of program committee conflicts and topic areas. Finally, despite the time pressure of having the submission deadline in September, the Council agreed that it would be detrimental to move it into the summer months.

Zilberstein made a proposal for Diversity @ AAAI, aimed at helping parents of young children attend AAAI. The proposal called for AAAI to institute a policy that is committed to supporting parents in creative ways with their childcare needs. The specific points of the proposal were as follows:

- (1) AAAI will post in a visible place on the conference website a general policy that embraces and welcomes the participation of parents with their children.
- (2) AAAI will research and provide information to attendees about available childcare services at or near the conference venue.
- (3) Complimentary tickets to all the social functions will be provided to children under the age of 12 that accompany an adult participant.
- (4) A nametag allowing access to the conference facilities will be provided at no charge to children under the age of 12 that accompany an adult participant.
- (5) When space allows, AAAI will identify a designated location at the conference venue where

people can bring their children to sit and talk and hang out.

Rao Kambhampati moved to accept the proposal, and Steve Smith seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

For AAAI-16, Zilberstein announced that Dale Schuurmans and Michael Wellman have been chosen as program cochairs.

Policy (Government Relations): Tom Dietterich noted that he has been working on getting this new committee off the ground, and has been recruiting volunteers. Initial members of the committee are Steve Smith, who volunteered to chair the committee, Yolanda Gil, Lise Getoor, and Sven Koenig. Dietterich will be convening the committee later this year after the 2015 survey. One issue that came up was whether the government relations component would also address funding issues in Europe and Canada, for instance.

Media and Website Working Group: This group is also newly formed, and will be putting together a set of use cases for the website to help better meet the needs of users and members. The committee will also be exploring the best plan to increase AAAI's footprint on social media channels, in addition to the establishment of a AAAI blog. Dietterich noted that AI Topics is also seeking one or more volunteers to run the site, and the Council encouraged the working group to appoint someone to take ownership of the AAAI Wikipedia page to keep it accurate and up to date. Sonia Chernova, Boi Faltings, Sylvie Thiebaux, Toby Walsh, and Mike Hamilton will serve on this committee.

New Business

Announcements: Tom Dietterich made several announcements about initiatives he has undertaken during recent months.

Community Meeting: Tom Dietterich noted that the first AAAI Community Meeting will take place during the conference on Wednesday evening. This new event will incorporate both the annual business meeting and a significantly expanded forum to include announcements and feedback from

the audience. Dietterich encouraged members of the Council to invite people to attend and participate. Refreshments will be served just prior to the meeting.

Federated Conference: Plans are currently underway for a federated AI conference in 2018 in Stockholm. The plan is to hold this event every four years. AAAI may wish to hold special meetings or a smaller event specifically focused at one research area. For further information, Patrick Doherty is the contact person.

Press Conference: Dietterich will also be holding a press conference to help get the word out about AI, and to help craft the message that people are hearing about AI. This will also be held on Wednesday during the conference.

Focus Committee: Dietterich will be holding a small focus group meeting, intended to flesh out ideas for new directions for AAAI in the coming years. The participants will include 4 officers or senior researchers, 5 mid-career researchers, and 4 students, as well as two professional facilitators. The group will produce a questionnaire that will be incorporated into the annual survey to help further refine possible directions.

Ethics Committee: An informal ethics committee was formed in November to help raise awareness in the community on ethical issues and the role of AI in ethical issues, and the Council was asked to formalize this committee. Tom Dietterich noted that he initially recruited Ben Kuipers and Toby Walsh to help, but that interest is great, and several more volunteers have stepped forward. He is also anxious to include people outside of AI on the committee. He noted that AAAI-15 has several events related to ethical issues, and he hopes that this momentum will be sustained in the future. The committee hopes to provide guidance on how to set research directions and pursue funding for desired research. The proposed AAAI Ethics Committee will comprise two cochairs, with the charter that up to half of its members can be nonmembers, approved by the cochairs. Sonia Chernova moved that the Committee be formed, and this motion was seconded by Ed Hovy. The Council voted unanimously to form

an ad hoc Ethics Committee, having no authority of the AAAI Council.

The formal portion of the meeting adjourned at 1:00 PM.

Over lunch and beyond, the Council discussed a variety of subjects in an open forum during the lunch period and early afternoon. Topics discussed were as follows:

Membership/Conference/International/Student Outreach:

- Team with other conferences to build membership through automatic inclusion in registration fees

- Provide a grant of \$1000 to conferences that offer reduced AAAI memberships on their registration forms

- Partner with European or other AI societies to offer introductory membership in AAAI

- Exhibit at other conferences for membership recruitment

- Add proliferation of student activities to the membership value statement

- Create more services for European members

- Sponsor invited speakers or integrated workshops at other conferences

- Mentor undergraduate students internationally

- AAAI serves as a channel of information for students to connect with mentors

- Collect information at time of paper submission (Manuela Veloso will contact CRA-W for their mechanism to do this)

- Support and organize job fairs for students

- Provide mentors for student abstract program participants

- Group mentoring through webinars or Q&A's for members

- Double the number of AAAI Doctoral Participants by halving the travel stipend

Final Formal Action

Extension of AAAI Conference Shift: In a final formal vote, the Council approved unanimously the extension of the experiment to shift the timeframe of the AAAI Conference to January/February timeframe through 2017.

The meeting adjourned at 3:10 PM.