

Chair's Message

Most ACM SIG conferences are single-blind: the authors don't know the reviewers (generally PC members), but the reviewers know the author(s)' identity. Some conferences use double-blind reviewing, in which the identity of the authors is hidden from the reviewers, ostensibly to improve the objectivity of the reviews. In a few others, the identity of the authors is hidden to the reviewers, but is revealed at the PC meeting.

ACM sponsors about 80 conferences annually; about 20% are double-blind. In discussions with other SIG chairs, they appear to be very satisfied with those conferences that are double-blind. However, there are passionate voices on both sides of the debate.

There are several advantages to double-blind reviewing. The primary objective is to raise the quality of reviewing by removing, when possible, bias based on the authors of the paper. This seems to occur in several ways: it is easier for the reviewers to be honest if the names of the authors are not staring them in the face, it is easier for the program committee to make tough decisions if they believe that the reviewers did not know the authors, and there is some evidence that this process is more fair to authors with obviously female names. It also has a major perceptual advantage, in that it makes the process *seem* more objective, which encourages young authors and less-published authors to submit papers, and reduces the perception that there is an insiders club. It seems to raise the quality of the conference; many conferences employing double-blind reviewing are considered to be the top conference in their area, e.g., CHI, DAC, ICSA, SIGCOMM and SOSP, though it is not clear which way the causality goes. Finally, there is evidence that prospective authors overwhelmingly want double-blind reviewing.

Double-blind reviewing comes with some disadvantages. It is an extra burden on authors, who must revise their papers with care to hide their identity, and on the program chair. It is often not hard for reviewers to guess the authors, circumventing the process. Well-known authors can use tricks to reveal themselves (such as whitening out a bibliographic entry but leaving it in alphabetical order). Calls for papers need to be carefully written to preclude (as much as possible) such tricks. Note however that even when the authors can be guessed, the guess is not certain, and there are sometimes surprises. Some argue that reviewing is already fair, and that double-blind reviewing won't increase the quality of reviewing. Some go the other direction and argue that author identity provides valuable clues as to the quality of the research, and that double-blind reviewing teaches young people that only ideas matter, rather than that persuasion and author credibility are important components in the process of science.

After discussions with many within SIGMOD, the majority of whom have requested double-blind reviewing, I've decided to have the SIGMOD conference try this for two years, after which the experiment will be evaluated, and a decision made to continue or to revert to the current method of single-blind reviewing. We'll start with the SIGMOD'01 conference. It will be interesting to see if the advantages in fact outweigh the disadvantages.

Speaking of conferences, I hope that you have registered for the SIGMOD'00 conference, to be held in Dallas on May 14–19, with the co-convened PODS'00 conference and several workshops before and after. When you come, don't forget to bring a spare database textbook to donate, helping disseminate the ideas our community has originated and nurtured. See you in Texas!

Rick Snodgrass
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