Chair's Message

My interest in temporal databases has led me to chronology, the science of time measurement, which then led me to horology, the science of clocks. Horology is a strange mixture of technical sophistication and old-world artistry. The prevalence of high quality digital timepieces is obviating the search for yet more effective escapement designs for mechanical watches. Being a computer scientist working in a digital world, I nevertheless mourn the gradual disappearance of mechanical watches, with their comforting regularity of audible ticking.

A watch is a wondrous device that does its job extremely well, without the user knowing anything about its inner workings. SIGMOD is similar in some ways: while no one would claim that it is a precision device, its internal operation is often mysterious. I certainly experienced and was somewhat chagrined by my ignorance of the ways in which various decisions within SIGMOD were made.

Just as my readings on horology have exposed some of the basic mechanisms in watches, such as the fundamental interplay between elasticity and inertia, my tenure as chair has provided some understanding of how SIGMOD arrives at various decisions, from making the many appointments to determining where the next conference should be held.

It turns out to not be mysterious at all. Most of the decisions, as befits a large organization, are made by committee, specifically, by the Executive Committee, which consists of seven people, three elected: the Chair (see the first page of this *Record* for a list of everyone involved), the Vice-Chair (Meral) and the Secretary/Treasurer (Eric), and four appointed: the *SIGMOD Record* editor (Mike Franklin), the Information Director (Alberto), the chair of the SIGMOD Advisory Board (Mike Carey), and the chair of the PODS Executive Committee (Victor). By the way, serving as Chair of the newly formed SIGKDD (Knowledge Discovery in Data) was taking all of Won's time, so he resigned from the SIGMOD Executive Committee; Mike Carey is the new chair of the Advisory Board.

The smaller decisions are hashed out by email discussion among the EC members. While the Chair is the final arbiter, decisions are by consensus. I am happy to say that the EC members are a quite opinionated (this is a compliment) and also agreeable lot, so our deliberations are generally efficient. The EC also meets about once a year for a one-day retreat, for face-to-face discussion. We get a lot done at these meetings.

The larger decisions deserve input from more people. The major money decisions and most appointments first involve discussion by the EC to frame the issues and arrive at a few specific choices, followed by email discussion with the entire eight-member Advisory Board. For example, the decision to go ahead with the Anthology represented a significant outlay of funds, and so was discussed by the Advisory Board. As another example, the location of the conference often results in much debate, sometimes coming down to those who are kinda wimpy and can't stand moderate temperatures, and those of us who find temperatures in the 90's to be refreshing. This unresolved dispute is the reason the conference is in Montreal one year and Dallas another.

Some responsibilities are delegated. For example, the conference program chair is responsible for the technical program of the conference, with the selection of the program committee a critical part of that process. The Editors (Mike Franklin, Isabel Cruz and Michael Ley) name the members of their respective editorial boards, and are responsible for editorial policy of their publications, with oversight and advice from the Executive Committee. The Awards Committee decides the award recipients independently. And the conference chair decides the destination of the book donation effort.

So that the various decisions are made with knowledge of external factors, I have appointed liaisons with other major database organizations (again, see the first page for this list). I feel strongly that it benefits everyone for SIGMOD to work cooperatively with its sister societies. This openness is already bearing fruit. Through the hard work of Stefano Ceri, the VLDB proceedings will be included in the SIGMOD Anthology, all 16,000 pages of quality papers. Dave Lomet, Editor-in-Chief of the IEEE Bulletin of Technical Committee on Data Engineering (TCDE), worked tirelessly to obtain the necessary permissions to include much of that publication in the Anthology. We are currently contacting other organizations through our liaisons, to include the proceedings of major database conferences in the Anthology and SIGMOD DiSC.

The EC reports to the SIG Governing Board, which is an ACM body consisting of the chairs of all the SIGs, some three dozen at last count. The SGB elects its own executive committee, the SGBEC (a real mouthful), which I serve on as a member-at-large. The SGB also elects representation on ACM Council; that person, Mary Whitton, ultimately represents you in the decision-making in the council. Whew!

Now, on to other things. There is a service you should be aware of. Every member of SIGMOD is (or should be) a member of the MOD-MEMBERS mailing list. I use this list to communicate late-breaking news to SIGMOD members. The volume of this mailing list is very low, less than one message a month.

If you haven't received any messages from me with a subject of "SIGMOD happenings" then you probably aren't on this list. In that case, you should contact ACM member services to let them know about your email address; as a member of SIGMOD you will then be automatically added to this mailing list. You can add this information via the web at

`http://www.acm.org/membership/csfaq.html`

by email by sending a message to `coa@acm.org`, by phone at 1-800-342-6626 (U.S./Can), by FAX at +1-212-944-1315, or by snail mail at ACM Member Services Department, 1515 Broadway, New York NY 10036-5701, USA. You might want do this now, while you are thinking about it!

Additionally, every SIGMOD member, including those who are not ACM members, can access the protected portions of the SIGMOD Online site via a membership number that can be used to create an account. To do so, first locate your membership number by looking at your mailing label on the back of this issue of SIGMOD Record. Then go to

`http://www.acm.org/account/create.html`

and create an ACM WWW account. This account will provide you access to the entire SIGMOD Online site. SIGMOD Online will be growing dramatically, to become an essential resource for the database community.

Rick Snodgrass
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