

Chair's Message

This is my last Chair's Message; as you read this, my term as SIGMOD Chair, along with the terms of Marianne Winslett (Vice-Chair) and Joachim Hammer (Secretary/Treasurer), is coming to a close. In a few weeks, we will know the results of elections and who will lead our organization for the next four years. The candidate slate is strong, and I am convinced that the organization will be very well served whoever are the new slate of officers.

Since this is the last time I communicate with you in this capacity, I thought I would provide a short report on what we accomplished in the past four years and where we failed. The following are some of the issues that we worked on:

- One of the major initiatives we worked on was the “internationalization” of SIGMOD and its activities. This was on my and Marianne's candidacy platforms, and I had raised it as a major issue in my first Chair's message. We have made significant progress on this front with the location of our flagship conference in locales outside of North America for the first time in its 30 year history. We had SIGMOD/PODS 2004 in Paris, France and we will have SIGMOD/PODS 2007 in Beijing, China. We hope to continue this trend in future years. Along these lines, we made progress in ensuring that there was better geographic representation on various SIGMOD bodies. In particular, both candidates for the Vice-Chair position this year are from outside North America. We need to continually work on expanding our membership base in all countries where there are data management research and development activities and ensure that these colleagues contribute to the running of our organization.
- SIGMOD is not a very large organization in terms of its membership size, but it is a very active one with many activities. To better cope with this level of activity and to lay the framework for future growth, we spent considerable time and energy to put in place an administrative structure that is more distributed and more “cabinet-like”. Consequently, we created some new positions (e.g., Conference Coordinator) and we enlarged the Executive Committee to include all of the major volunteers. The Executive Committee, with the advice of the Advisory Board, now makes all the major decisions regarding SIGMOD. In addition to our face-to-face meetings, we hold monthly conference calls that allow us to address issues in a timely fashion. We updated the Bylaws to reflect these changes and these changes are now in the ratification process by membership.
- One of the joys of my position is to run the awards ceremony at our annual SIGMOD/PODS conference; this is a highlight event where we recognize those among us who have excelled in various activities. They also bring recognition to SIGMOD within the ACM community and beyond. We have renamed our Innovations Award in honor of Ted Codd who passed away in 2003. The new name “SIGMOD Edgar F. Codd Innovations Award” was approved by ACM Council and the first renamed award was given last year.

This year we are starting a new award, SIGMOD Doctoral Dissertation Award, which, as its name implies, will be given to one dissertation each year, starting in 2006. This award is supported by Microsoft Research (thanks to Jim Gray) and we are in the process of forming the selection committee.

- We started to collaborate with other database organizations. Two activities are particularly important to note. The first is the SIGMOD-VLDB Library Program where we collaborate

with VLDB Endowment in distributing 1000 SIGMOD Anthology Silver Edition DVDs to institutions in developing countries. To date, we have distributed about 400 copies. The second is our recent collaboration with VLDB Endowment in handling papers submitted to the annual SIGMOD conference and the VLDB conference. As I reported in earlier columns, the authors of some of these papers will be given the option of revising their papers and submitting the revised version for re-consideration by the original reviewers, but for presentation at the next conference. The hope is that this will reduce the load on each conference PC and will reduce, to a certain extent, the chance-effect of conference reviews. We will include ICDE in the mix as soon as the process gets smoothed out.

- Working on and stabilizing SIGMOD budget was a major activity over my tenure. SIGMOD's many activities had drained our reserves and the membership fees had not been adjusted in over ten years, causing significant pressure on our budget. ACM's changing (read increasing) charges and fund balance requirements only added to this pressure. We addressed the issue in a number of ways. We went over each of our activities and decided to scale back or cut those which are not within our core services; we instituted a "pay-as-you-go" system whereby any new activity had to be accompanied by a budget analysis and reasonable assurance that the required funds were available; and we conducted a study to determine our direct membership costs and adjusted the membership fee to cover our direct costs. Right now the budget is stable, thanks in part to the ACM Digital Library income (which attests to the wisdom of digitizing most of SIGMOD material by Rick Snodgrass's administration), but expenses will need to be carefully watched.
- Membership is one area that we were not able to address adequately. Following the adjustment of the membership fee, we are now in a good position to increase membership, but we were not able to launch a major membership drive. This is one task that we will have to hand over to the next administration. Our current membership is stable around 2,800, but I believe there is room for growth, in particular outside of North America and among graduate students.

I'd like to end with some personal thanks. I have been a member of SIGMOD since 1975 or 76 (I don't have the exact date and ACM's records are not helpful) when I was only a master's student and this has always been my professional home. It was a great honor to be asked to run for Chair four years ago and it was a privilege to serve; I have greatly enjoyed the experience (well, most of it!) and appreciate having had the chance to put some of my ideas into action. SIGMOD's work during these past years were shouldered by a great many colleagues who volunteered their time, sometimes more than they were led to believe. I will not name all of them, their names can be found on the inside covers of current and past SIGMOD Record issues. I thank them all for their work. I want to thank Marianne and Joachim for being tremendous partners, and Rick for his continuous help. Most importantly, I thank you for the opportunity to serve in this capacity and for your support; I am sure you will extend the same support to our next set of officers.

M. Tamer Özsu
May, 2005