

Welcome from the Co-Conveners and Conference Co-Chairs

The Australasian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education (ascilite) is very pleased to be holding its 24th Annual Conference in the beautiful location of Singapore, at the Nanyang Technological University. The Annual Conference has developed an international reputation for the scope and extent of its program and the quality of the ideas and innovations that are presented. This conference promises to continue this trend.

The theme for the conference, *ICT: Providing Choices for Learners and Learning*, has provided a perfect context for the sharing and exchange of contemporary research and development in the use of ICT in tertiary teaching at this conference. This is evident in the quality and quantity of entries that are included in this book of abstracts of the presentations at the conference.

Information and communications technologies provide many opportunities for learners and learning. High on the list of opportunities is the provision of choice. The informed use of ICT by institutions and their teachers supports flexibility and choice in what is to be learned, how it is learned, when it is learned and how it will be assessed. The theme for ascilite Singapore 2007 focuses on catering for the diversity of learners and learning and how we as educators can provide stimulating and engaging learning environments and experiences for all our learners through the use of ICT in higher education.

The provision of choice in any learning setting is a critical element in fostering learner ownership and engagement. Choice can be present in many different forms and guises, and is able to contribute to learning outcomes in many different ways. Learning technologies are especially well suited to supporting both teachers and learners in the provision of choice as the many papers and presentations described in this set of abstracts demonstrate.

Modern education is very much geared towards the delivery of quality educational programs to the masses. Education is no longer a privilege for the elite and has become an expectation for citizens of all countries. With the massification of education comes the need to discover ways to effectively and efficiently deliver programs. Learning technologies have proven to be a powerful tool supporting this quest. Providing choices for learners helps to improve education. Recognising that no two learners are the same, learning technologies offer ways to provide courses and programs that cater for individual needs and differences. On its own, however, learner choice can impede aspects of learning and there is usually a strong need for learner choice to be supported well. Again, learning technologies offer many solutions for learning supports through such means as increased information access and enhanced communications.

Singapore 2007 is the ascilite Conference's first time in Southeast Asia, and it is more than fulfilling expectations about increasing the Society's engagement with the region, as evidenced by Review Panel composition, and by our data on countries of origin for paper submissions and acceptances. We thank authors and reviewers for a level of support equaling or exceeding previous Conferences, we acknowledge generous support from our sponsors, we appreciate very much the considerable amount of excellent work by our Program Committee and Conference organisation team, and we very grateful for the host role undertaken so well by Nanyang Technological University. We extend a special welcome to our 'first time' and 'novice' presenters, and a special thank you to our 'first time' reviewers, as the Conference continues its fine record of providing a professional growth and career development event for these groups.

We anticipate that ascilite Singapore 2007 will continue the strong tradition of previous meetings and will provide a forum that will encourage collaboration and reflection among the delegates. We expect it will identify many new ideas and innovative applications of learning technologies to solve pressing and important educational problems and issues in tertiary education. We wish all delegates an enjoyable and valuable experience at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore at ascilite 2007.

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Editorial from the Program Committee

A Program Committee was established to conduct the review and selection of papers and abstracts for presentation at the conference. The Committee prepared submission guidelines, review criteria and publicity for the *Call for papers* [1], and customised an installation of *MyReview* [2], hosted by *NetSpot* [3], to support the submission and review processes. The *Call for papers* included sections on *Review procedure* and *Advice to Reviewers*, designed to integrate with our customisation of *MyReview*. During the submission phase, our closing date, set initially at 23 July 2007 for all categories, was extended to 20 August for full and concise papers, and to 8 October for posters. At 23 July we had received only 43 submissions of papers and 5 posters, compared with a final total of 172 papers and 23 posters (Table 1). We did our best to accommodate 'booked in late arrivals' after 20 August without pressuring reviewers unduly, but some inquirers were so late that they had to change to the poster category with its later deadline.

Table 1: Numbers of submissions and presentations at ascilite Singapore 2007

| Category | Refereed | Submitted | Full papers | | Concise papers | | Posters | | Rejected |
|----------------|----------|-----------|-------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| | | | Accepted | Presented | Accepted | Presented | Accepted | Presented | |
| Full papers | Yes | 109 | 81 | 80 | 5 | 3 | 20 | 7 | 3 |
| Concise papers | Yes | 63 | - | - | 44 | 43 | 18 | 12 | 1 |
| Posters | No | 23 | - | - | - | - | 23 | 21 | 0 |
| Total | | 195 | 81 | 80 | 49 | 46 | 61 | 40 | 4 |

Data is at 15 November 2007. The numbers presented are lower than numbers accepted owing to cancellations and declining of offers, which occurred mainly in the category of "full paper offered poster". The table does not record workshops: Committee received 12 workshop proposals and accepted 9.

The Committee recruited a Review Panel comprising 201 volunteers drawn from reviewers for previous ascilite Conferences [4], from AJET's review panel [5], from authors of papers presented at previous Conferences or published in AJET, and from general headhunting amongst the memberships of ascilite and kindred societies such as HERDSA, ODLAA and ALT, and amongst educational researchers in the Conference's host university. Members were drawn from 11 countries (Table 2). The Committee commissioned three reviews per paper for 172 submissions (Table 1) on a "double blind" basis, with an average allocation of 2.5 papers per reviewer. The Committee's editors (Roger Atkinson and Clare McBeath) checked nearly all papers for double blind compliance and dealt with about 20 (3.9%) missing reviews. About 11 (2.1%) reviews were agreed cancellations due to sick leave or other problems notified to Committee. We record our high appreciation of the review panel's overall performance with respect to deadlines, and the relatively very small number of missing reviews.

Table 2: Origins of reviewers by country

| Countries or city or province | No. | % |
|--|-----|------|
| Australia (.au) | 128 | 63.7 |
| Singapore (.sg) | 25 | 12.5 |
| United Kingdom (.uk) | 16 | 8.0 |
| New Zealand (.nz) | 13 | 6.5 |
| Malaysia (.my) | 8 | 4.0 |
| Hong Kong (.hk) | 4 | 2.0 |
| Other: USA (2), Sweden (2), Oman (1), Greece (1), Taiwan (1) | 7 | 3.5 |
| Total | 201 | 100 |

In the selection phase we relied very much upon *MyReview's* facility for calculating a ranked list, based on each paper's average score derived from three reviews and a seven point rating scale applied to six criteria. We are happy to record that we recommend *MyReview* to other potential users. Though it has some idiosyncracies and irritations, it customised quite well, was reasonably easy to use and performed reliably under full load. At peak time, the 14 September closing date for submission of reviews, it required up to 30 seconds to produce the 'all papers ranked' list.

However, *MyReview* and any other system, be it software based or manual, cannot overcome the element of subjectivity that is inevitable in any review process. Nevertheless, we can take some practical steps towards monitoring of aggregate outcomes from the review process. Table 3 was compiled for two reasons. Firstly, to provide relevant information to meet ascilite Society and Conference interest in regional support, and secondly as a routine monitoring to detect concerns, if any, about review process equity (we view Table 3 as reassuring). Similar information about submissions and acceptances by country or region has been published for AJET [6]. Table 4 monitors full paper acceptance rates for

ascilite Conferences, compiled in response to a request for data sought by an author's university conference and travel funding procedures.

Table 3: Origins of submissions and acceptances of full and concise papers by country

| Countries or city (a) | No. submitted | % of submissions | No. accepted (b) | % accepted |
|-----------------------|---------------|------------------|------------------|------------|
| Australia (.au) | 103 | 59.9 | 77 | 74.8 |
| Singapore (.sg) | 19 | 11.0 | 15 | 78.9 |
| New Zealand (.nz) | 17 | 9.9 | 14 | 82.4 |
| United Kingdom (.uk) | 8 | 4.7 | 7 | 87.5 |
| Malaysia (.my) | 8 | 4.7 | 5 | 62.5 |
| Hong Kong (.hk) | 4 | 2.3 | 3 | 75.0 |
| USA and Canada | 4 | 2.3 | 4 | 100.0 |
| Others (c) | 9(c) | 5.2 | 5 | 55.6 |
| Total | 172 | 100.0 | 130 | 75.0 |

- Determined from address or home country of first author.
- Accepted as full or concise papers.
- One from each of Arab Emirates, Chile, Fiji, Japan, Mauritius, Oman, Pakistan, Portugal, South Africa.

Table 4: Full paper acceptance rates for ascilite Conferences

| Year | No. full papers submitted | No. of full papers accepted | % acceptance |
|------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|
| 2007 | 109 | 81 | 74.3% |
| 2006 | 108 | 71 | 65.7% |
| 2005 | 82 | 58 | 70.7% |
| 2004 | 104 | 69 | 66.3% |

Average acceptance rate 2004-2007: 69.3%

Table 5 suggests a generally 'steady course with modest increases' in ascilite Conference submissions and presentations. However, one trend that we hope to strengthen is an increasing role for poster presentations. For this Conference, we offered authors in the 'full or concise to poster' categories advice along these lines:

Program Committee Comments

We accepted the Reviewers' ratings which placed your paper outside the range for acceptance. However, we recommend that you consider the offer of poster presentation as a way to engage with the Conference. For the published Proceedings, you may revise to 3-4 pages in the specified formatting and may include graphics. Preparing a 'summary' version for the Conference, and obtaining feedback upon it, may help you to start developing a full length version for future submission to a journal. Prior presentation at a conference usually makes a favourable impression upon journal reviewers and editors.

Table 5: Numbers of presentations at ascilite Conferences 2001-2007

| | Melb 01 | Auck 02 | Adel 03 | Perth 04 | Bris 05 | Syd 06 | Sg 07** |
|------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|----------|---------|--------|---------|
| Total number submissions received* | na | 185 | 118 | 153 | 119 | 194 | 195 |
| Total number presentations*** | 104 | 124 | 109 | 131 | 96 | 152 | 166 |
| Full papers ('traditional' pres.) | 61 | 76 | 60 | 68 | 56 | 69 | 80 |
| Concise papers ('short' pres.) | 24 | 31 | 38 | 51 | 30 | 53 | 46 |
| Poster presentations | 19 | 17 | 11 | 12 | 10 | 30 | 40 |

Notes: * The table does not record workshop proposals or acceptances. Melbourne 2001 numbers are from the Conference website. Numbers for others are from the printed *Proceedings* and the websites. There are some minor discrepancies between Programs and Proceedings, presumably due to cancellations, not detailed in this table.

** Singapore 07 data is at 15 November 2007.

*** The number of presentations is lower than total accepted due to cancellations and declining of offers, which occurred mainly in the category of "full paper offered poster".

The idea that conference presentations can be a developmental stage in 'working up' a research project towards a full publication is far from new. Academic societies conducting conferences have used the idea for very many years. However, in recent times, academic research conferences in Australia have been channelled more towards presentation of completed research in contrast to discussion and developmental support for research in progress. As summed up by one of our reviewers, Dr Rob Phillips [7]:

Comments for PC: This paper would have been perfect for a conference in the 1990's. It outlines a research agenda in a disciplined manner, with a plan for proceeding. This is sensible content to highlight at a conference, to start some dialogue and collaboration around it. However, when the DEST points for refereed papers came in, this type of paper is no longer acceptable against the

criteria. This is a pity. With the onset of the RQF in Australia, refereed conference papers won't count so strongly. ascilite should consider evolving its criteria to allow publication of and discussion about papers like this one. [7]

Based upon a rather large amount of reading of papers and email correspondence for this Conference, we are happy to help advance the idea that ascilite's conference paper selection criteria should evolve, to become less geared towards Australian government policy specifications [8], and more geared towards "dialogue and collaboration", or being "a developmental stage in 'working up' a research project". That would fit better with *Australasian region* needs in contrast to *Australian* needs, and with the professional and career developing role of conferences.

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