

The Initial Process for an Australian Ranking of ICT Conferences

Origins of ICT Conference Ranking Project

In late 2005, NICTA and ANU decided to fund research into a ranking system for conferences attended by Australian ICT Academics. They employed ANU's Research Evaluation and Policy Project (REPP). This group, headed by Linda Butler, undertake bibliometric analyses of research data.

Aims

In assessing research quality we believe it is important for quantitative indicators to go hand in hand with other qualitative methods. The motivation for producing a rankings list in ICT is two-fold. Firstly, the RQF preferred model makes many references to the use of metrics in assessing the quality and impact of research. As you are no doubt aware the use of bibliometrics is problematic for ICT disciplines where a major mode of research dissemination is through conferences not journal literature. Secondly, it may be valuable to have robust indicators from conference data in the assessment of academic performance.

Process

A number of steps were taken in the process of ranking conferences into tiers:

1. An initial small project steering group met in late 2005 to commence the project and map out the steps.
2. In the following months, various research assistants accessed a Research Evaluation and Policy Project (REPP) database of publications provided by 26 Australian universities across a 10 year time frame for a separate project. All conference publications from ICT departments were identified, and conference names were standardised. Over 10,000 publications were 'cleaned' and approximately 1500 conferences were identified. A second search was then made of the REPP database to identify all publications in these conferences, including papers coming from non-ICT departments.

3. A master list of conferences was created and additional information was added next to each conference where available. This included:

- Department of Computer Science at the National University of Singapore (NUS) ranking of conferences further modified and enhanced by Guofei Gu at Georgia Tech in the United States and
- the 'Area' for each conference as specified in the NUS/Georgia Tech rankings
- CiteSeer rankings and citation per publication figures
- ISI Web of Science citation data (extracted in the course of a separate REPP project)
- Acceptance Rates
- Number of publications reported by Australian universities

From this information, a draft ranking of conferences was constructed.

4. A workshop of approximately 20 ICT researchers from a number of universities and across a range of disciplines was convened in Canberra in mid-March 2006 to continue the ranking process by:

- deciding on the number of tiers
- drafting the descriptors for each tier

deciding on ICT 'areas' or disciplines (not easy!)
editing the draft ranking of conferences which were based on a modified UCL Davis ranking
adding additional conferences that were missing from the lists.

5. Workshop participants subsequently undertook further consultation in their own institutions and provided additional feedback.

6. The conference lists were then distributed throughout the academic community in the middle of 2006 for further input and comment. This was undertaken through peak bodies in computing and information sciences. The lists were distributed widely to all researchers, though comments and feedback were co-ordinated through heads of departments.

7. The penultimate meeting of the project reference group in early November 2006 considered the responses from the sector, and incorporated comments into a final conference ranking list. At this point, all area lists were consolidated into a single ranking as it was discovered that conferences classified to two or more areas were nearly always given identical rankings by the different disciplines.

8. Universities were then approached to provide their conference publication details for a five year period, 2000-2006, and the distribution of these across the four tiers was determined for each institution. The final meeting of the reference group in early December 2006 analysed the results, and accepted the final ranking list. At the same time, a procedure for an annual update of the lists was developed.

Annual updates

A companion document details the process to be followed for annual updates.