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Equity Talks @SIGCHI

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ABSTRACT

The Executive Committee (EC) of ACM Special Interest Group on Computer-Human Interaction (SIGCHI) organized a series of ten equity talks from March 2021 to August 2021. These were hour-long recorded virtual roundtable sessions, for which we solicited participation from the SIGCHI community on concerns and questions relating to equity, in a number of areas relevant to SIGCHI. Many concerns were listed, some were repeated across topics, and the EC followed due diligence when it came to presenting this information to the community. What comes next?

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CCS CONCEPTS

• **Human-centered computing;**

KEYWORDS

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1 SIGCHI EQUITY TALKS

As the previous SIGCHI Executive Committee (EC) approached the end of its three-year term, several members came together to organize a series of community-facing roundtable sessions that we called **Equity Talks**¹. These were aimed at discussing and summarizing a number of equity issues that shaped the workings of the EC and the SIGCHI community at large, circling us back to our commitment to *listen, reflect, act, and represent* made in June 2020: “The task that lies before us is one of weaving equity, inclusion, and solidarity into each of our scholarly and professional activities, so that ‘diversity and inclusion’ are not add-ons, but deeply integrated into our every practice, whether it involves conference processes, volunteering responsibilities, or global community support mechanisms.”

The Equity Talks originally planned to cover 4/5 topics, but new topics emerged as the sessions were organized and shared with the SIGCHI community, and in the end these are the sessions that took place: Being Global; Making SIGCHI Accessible; Reviewing and Mentorship; Infrastructuring Equity; Understanding Gender; Research and Practice; The Future of SIGCHI; SIGCHI Across Chapters; Making SIGCHI Sustainable; and Race and SIGCHI. Each of these sessions was 90 minutes long, including a 60-minute recorded session and a 30-minute unrecorded session. The goal of the former was to ensure that conversations could be documented, shared, and drawn on in the future to effect change. The goal of the latter was to ensure that there was also a safe space for participants to touch on topics that were especially thorny. Our goal was as much to foster awareness around concerns on these issues as it was to summarize them so that the new EC might be assisted in taking these on.

All sessions were hosted by one or more members of the EC, and moderated by Cale Passmore. The EC members who were responsible for organizing the series included Neha Kumar and Shaowen Bardzell (Vice-Presidents at Large), Stacy Branham and Soraia Prietch (Adjunct Chairs for Accessibility), Adriana S. Vivacqua and Vinoba Vinayagamoorthy (Adjunct Chairs for Equity), and Theresa Tanenbaum (Vice-President for Publications). The final two sessions were structured somewhat differently, where additional members of the SIGCHI community came together to organize and plan the sessions. This included Chris Clarke, Jason Jacques, Bridget Kane, Kelly Widdicks, and Kristin Williams for the ninth session on sustainability, and Adriana Alvarado, Angela Smith, Bryan Dosono, Cale Passmore, Ihudiya Finda Williams, and Marisol Wong-Villacres for the tenth session on race and SIGCHI.

2 WHAT COMES NEXT?

The work of listening, reflecting, acting, and representing makes steady progress as the current/new EC members take on their roles. We recognize that these processes must be interwoven and continuous, and entail a spiraling action as we delve deeper to unpack the challenges that continue facing our community members, endlessly erecting barriers to participation that we must work hard to dismantle. But the listening must be interspersed with moments of taking stock, like this SIG proposes, posing the following questions:

- (1) What is the list of changes requested by our members to address equity concerns?

- (2) What changes have been introduced already? What comes in the way of introducing other changes?
- (3) As we have involved our members in posing problems, can we also engage them in brainstorming solutions?
- (4) And how do we continue the process of listening and reflecting even as we do the above?

SIGCHI is an organization that has now been around for 40 years; it is approximately 2800 members strong, but its community includes many more—all the thousands who attend its 24 Human-Computer Interaction conferences, the largest of which is its flagship ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI) series. In 2022, as SIGCHI gets ready to celebrate its rich 40 year-history in various ways, how do we also ensure that the next 40 years are equitable in all the ways that the Equity Talks helped us imagine? As we get together with our community at the CHI conference in New Orleans and virtually across the globe, this continuing dialogue will make space for interested SIGCHI members to participate in brainstorming and shaping equitable SIGCHI (and HCI) futures. Led by the current SIGCHI EC, this exercise will also discuss commitments and responsibilities that must be fulfilled for such desired futures to emerge.

3 WHAT IS SIGCHI?

To many in our community, it is unclear what SIGCHI really is, and whether/how it is different from the ACM CHI Conference. Knowing what SIGCHI is and does, and the scope within which it can enact change, is a critical first step towards making a difference. This will also be our focus in the first five minutes of the SIG. We will clarify, for instance, that SIGCHI is an organizational unit of the ACM, along with other SIGs that are committed to the growth of different sub-disciplines within Computing. SIGCHI sponsors 24 conferences in addition to CHI; each of these conferences is committed to nurturing particular research areas within HCI. The SIGCHI EC is entrusted with a portfolio of responsibilities, some determined by pre-existing bylaws and others by current leadership, and covers a number of topics central to the wellbeing of our community and needed to support a thriving research environment for all members.

The current EC, collaboratively organizing this SIG, consists currently of 19 members. This includes the previously elected *Past President* (Helena Mentis), newly elected *President* (Neha Kumar) and *Executive Vice-President* (VP) (Shaowen Bardzell), *VP Finances* (Andrew Kun), *VP Membership & Communications* (Tamara L. Clegg), and two *VPs at Large* (Adriana S. Vivacqua and Naomi Yamashita) whose roles entail taking on responsibilities depending on the current needs of SIGCHI. The six newly elected members then appoint four additional VPs: for *Conferences* (Susanne Boll), *Operations* (Kashyap Todi), *Chapters* (Matt Jones), and *Publications* (Pejman Mirza-Babaei), and identify areas for Adjunct Chair roles. We currently have the following Adjunct Chairs: for *Awards* (Josh Andres), *Accessibility* (Stacy Branham), *Equity* (Cale Passmore), *Partnerships* (Susan Dray), *Knowledge Sharing* (Simone Kriglstein), *Volunteer Support* (Priya Kumar), *Community Support* (Luigi De Russis), and *Sustainability* (Nic Bidwell).

What each of the above members works on exactly, and how these roles are enacted over a three-year term, depends on the EC

¹<https://medium.com/sigchi/equity-talks-sigchi-7b38b8e3477>

members' individual and collective goals and visions. These volunteers contribute significant chunks of time to understanding the needs of the SIGCHI community, using the mechanisms currently available to them, and devise ways to address these needs. This community-centric approach relies greatly on whose voices we (are able to) hear, and thus it is crucial that venues such as this SIG that we propose can take place at regular intervals and in diverse contexts. The EC therefore has come together to organize this SIG as a collective, with each of the 19 members contributing towards listening, facilitating, and brainstorming.

4 WHAT WILL WE DO?

We will solicit participation from the broader SIGCHI community, as inclusively as possible, advertising our SIG well in advance using regular SIGCHI communications channels such as Twitter, Facebook, Discord, LinkedIn, as well as our SIGCHI-members mailing list. Below we lay out our before/during/after plans.

4.1 Before the SIG

To ensure that we make the most of our 75 minutes together and hit the ground running, we will start our discussions a month prior to CHI, inviting CHI attendees and SIGCHI members (particularly their overlap). We will ask these participants to help generate a live, shared Google document, with questions structured into sections that align with the prior Equity Talks topics, including an additional *miscellaneous* "catch-all" section. The EC will look over this document prior to the SIG to identify 3–5 areas to focus on.

4.2 During the SIG

We will spend the first five minutes, as mentioned above, clarifying what SIGCHI is and does. In the next ten minutes, we will present a summary of the live document, identifying topics for 3–5 breakout sessions. In the next twenty minutes, we will distribute participants into these sessions as they attempt to brainstorm over the identified topics of discussion. In the following twenty minutes, we will ask participants to switch sessions, contributing to advancing conversations on a new topic. The final twenty minutes will be spent summarizing conversations and finalizing plans for following up. Each breakout session will be "hosted" by a group of EC members whose roles may be related to the topic in question.

4.3 After the SIG

The SIGCHI Adjunct Chair for Equity, Cale Passmore, will be responsible for collating the information gathered in the time leading up to and during the SIG. We will report back to the community about what was discussed, in our SIGCHI Medium publication and periodic Community Square article for ACM Interactions. Our various EC members will factor the lessons learned into their role workflows, reporting back to SIGCHI in future years as to what changes were brought about as a result.

5 MORE TO BE DONE

Much feedback from the Equity Talks was received as the events progressed, and the conversations themselves were often eye-opening, and generally engaging. Of the approx. 350 attendees across sessions, many attended more than one session, and there was always

much to learn about the challenges that face our community in the short and long term. However, there are gaps that we must consider for the future. Often we heard that the sessions were not timed to include our global community, or that they did not include globally relevant perspectives on gender and/or race and ethnicity. Aside from the timings and cultural positioning of conversations, there was despondency around what could be done to ensure sustainable conference futures, or to guarantee a safe conference environment for our students and early career researchers. And even if changes could be discussed and agreed upon, is there sufficient trust to believe that changes will be enacted once the conversation is over?

There are many gaps, and even if we do not have all the solutions, there is much more that can be done. Our goal with this SIG is to ensure that we support SIGCHI as it develops into a more community-centric organization, where it is responsive to the needs of a wide variety of SIGCHI members and not only a select few. We look forward to having these conversations with the SIGCHI community at CHI 2022.