

AMS COMMITTEE ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE APPLICATIONS TO ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE ANNUAL MEETING MINUTES

MONDAY, JANUARY 24, 2011, 1:15 PM

The annual meeting of the Committee on Artificial Intelligence Applications to Environmental Science was held in conjunction with the AMS Annual Meeting in Seattle, WA. Committee Chair John Williams led the discussion.

John opened the meeting by welcoming the new Committee members and Chair-elect Amy McGovern, who will also be the Program Chair for the 10th AI Conference in 2012.

The next topic involved planning our next conference. Since holding joint sessions with a diverse set of other conferences is so important, it was decided not to pursue any specialty meetings. More panel discussions like the one in the Hydrology joint session a couple of years ago would be good, however; for instance, a panel discussion in a joint session with Probability and Statistics next year might work well. Using some Program Chair funds to support an invited speaker next year might be worth pursuing, along with student awards or student travel support. The Committee did not feel that it was important to encourage submission of extended abstracts, since they don't really "count." There was a consensus that we should pursue a large number of joint sessions next year; IIPS was mentioned as a particularly important one, given the technology theme.

William Hsieh reported that the proposal for an AI-related workshop in Banff in 2012 was not approved. He has requested feedback on the proposal, and submitting a proposal for the following year might be a possibility.

Committee members were supportive of the idea of submitting a proposal to organize the NCAR ASP Summer Colloquium in the summer of 2012. Mike Baldwin shared from his experience in summer 2010 that it is important to have at least a couple of organizers present at the Colloquium for the entire time. The new Colloquium schedule specifies a three-week program, and there was concern expressed that it could be hard to fully staff, especially given that many Committee members are funded under soft money. Still, we will plan to apply again next fall.

Discussion on Sunday's Educational Forum centered on some of the problems encountered: it wasn't listed in the online program, and some participants reported that the staff at the registration desk did not know where it was located. That may have contributed to the disappointing attendance, with only about 20% of those who had signed up attending. If we do one again, it was suggested that we coordinate with the Student Conference planning committee and make sure it is listed on the Student Conference schedule. It was suggested that we might want to organize an Educational Forum or a Short Course in 2013.

Amy suggests organizing a booth at WeatherFest with some cool demonstrations of AI applications ("eye candy"). She will pursue this possibility as next year's Program Chair.

The next issue was whether to continue the AI Contest, which has proven to take quite a bit of effort to put together and has not drawn the participation we had hoped, especially without cash prizes the last couple of years. Jenny Abernethy, this year's organizer, expressed her opinion that it should continue, though perhaps not every year. It was suggested that announcing the contest earlier could help with participation, and that perhaps the travel of the winning entry could be supported using Program Chair funds. Also, advertising effectively is key. The idea was raised of joining forces with another conference to get a new constituency involved. A panel discussion could follow presentations by the top entries.

The next topic was whether to change our Committee and conference name from “Artificial Intelligence” to “Computational Intelligence.” This year’s Educational Forum and session titles were all named with “Computational Intelligence” as a step in this direction. Amy believes, and some others agreed, that “Computational Intelligence” does not encompass as broad a range of techniques as “Artificial Intelligence” and so would not be an appropriate substitute. The Committee agreed to continue this discussion via email or teleconference.

We next discussed whether to expand the Committee, and in particular to have two student members with overlapping terms. This idea was supported; greater membership would facilitate more diverse and broader participation in the Committee. However, John pointed out the importance of all members taking initiative in seeking out making nominations of well-qualified new members to help achieve this goal.

John also encouraged nominations for AMS Awards and Fellowships, which frequently get very few nominations.

David John Gagne II, our new student member and volunteer webmaster, invited all members of the Committee to send him suggestions on additional material, links, resources and datasets for our website. He would like to create a list of prior Committee members, add links to our personal web pages, and include datasets from previous AI contests. Also, pending the outcome of our discussion on a possible name change for the Committee, we may want to purchase a convenient domain name. Currently, amsai.org is available (but amsai.org is not).

We brainstormed ideas for enhancing communication and collaboration within the AMS AI community. The idea of starting a Facebook page for the Committee was brought up. It could be used to announce various Committee activities and updates; it could have multiple administrators to spread the burden and promote continuity. No real downside was seen, unless we let it lapse. We decided it was worth a try. Other ideas were to revitalize the ai-envsci@lighthouse.tamucc.edu email list hosted by Philippe Tissot. The possibility of setting up an AMS special interest group was also mentioned, but it wasn’t clear what the next steps would be.

The meeting adjourned just before 2 pm.