

OVERVIEW OF THE ASSETS 2016 CONFERENCE

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This year was the 18th edition of the ACM SIGACCESS International Conference on Computers and Accessibility (ASSETS 2016)¹, which took place in October in Reno, Nevada, USA. The ASSETS conference is the premier computing research conference exploring the design, evaluation, and use of computing and information technologies to benefit people with disabilities and older adults. We set a new attendance record for ASSETS, with 173 participants from across the globe. In addition to a rich technical program, an increase in industrial sponsorship allowed the conference to support several receptions, including an event at the National Automobile Museum in Reno.

SIGACCESS made several awards during this year's conference: The SIGACCESS Outstanding Contribution Award was made to Professor Richard Ladner, from the University of Washington; Dr. Ladner gave the keynote presentation at the beginning of the conference. The best paper award went to "Would You Be Mine: Appropriating Minecraft as an Assistive Technology for Youth with Autism" by Kathryn Ringland, Christine Wolf, LouAnne Boyd, Mark Baldwin and Gillian Hayes. The best student paper award went to "Uncovering Challenges and Opportunities for 3D Printing Assistive Technology with Physical Therapists" by Samantha McDonald, Niara Comrie, Erin Buehler, Nicholas Carter, Braxton Dubin, Karen Gordes, Sandy McCombe-Waller and Amy Hurst.

Behind the Scenes

After a successful ASSETS 2015 conference in Lisbon, Portugal, last year, the ASSETS conference returned to the USA in 2016. Reno, Nevada, is a popular location for conventions and events, with close transportation links to the U.S. west coast. In addition, with nearby researchers who are members of the ASSETS community, we were pleased to have a lot of local support: Eelke Folmer from the University of Nevada Reno served as our local arrangements chair, and Bill Grussenmeyer of the University of Nevada Reno was our Student Volunteer chair. After considering several local hotel options, the Atlantis Resort was selected as a conference site, given its accessibility and on-site restaurant and entertainment options (which can simplify the logistics for our participants in planning evening events, without needing to consider accessible evening transportation options off-site). We thank our Treasurer and Registration Chair Raja Kushalnagar from Gallaudet University, along with our accessibility chair Erin Brady from Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis.

In the lead-up to the conference, announcements about the details were shared by email, our website, and on social media such as Facebook² and Twitter. We thank our Web Chair Lourdes Morales-Villaverde from UC Santa Cruz and our Publicity Chair Kyle Rector from University of Iowa.

In a spirit of welcoming new researchers into the community, the ASSETS conference continued its tradition of offering a mentorship program to support authors who had not previously published at ASSETS. Our Mentoring chair for 2016 was Leah Findlater from the University of Maryland, and we

¹ <http://assets16.sigaccess.org/>

² <https://www.facebook.com/groups/318413479187/>

thank our mentors: Erin Brady, Kotaro Hara, Amy Hurst, Hesham Kamel, Richard Ladner, Clayton Lewis, Kyle Montague, Alan Newell, Luz Rello, and Michele Williams.

The program committee and chairs also worked hard on the technical program for the event. The ASSETS 2016 program committee consisted of 56 international experts in the field of computing accessibility research from industry and academia. We received 95 submissions of full-length technical papers, of which 24 were selected for inclusion in the technical program: for an acceptance rate of 25%. As was done for ASSETS 2015, the acceptance decisions were made through a process of review and online discussion among the program committee members. The program committee also reviewed 58 posters submissions (29 accepted), 15 demos (7 accepted), and 10 experience reports (4 accepted). Our poster and demo chairs for 2016 were Stephanie Ludi (University of North Texas) and Kyle Montague (Newcastle University), and our Experience Reports chair was Tiago Guerreiro (University of Lisbon).

In addition, members of the program committee and other senior researchers helped to review submissions for the Student Research Competition (chaired by David Flatla of the University of Dundee and Anke Brock of Inria Bordeaux) and Doctoral Consortium events (chaired by Amy Hurst of UMBC and Karyn Moffatt of McGill University).

The Conference Program

On Monday October 24th, the program began with the chairs thanking our sponsors and the organizing committee for all of their work in supporting the event. The first session of the program began with the presentation of the 2016 SIGACCESS Award for Outstanding Contribution, an award that recognizes individuals who have made significant and lasting contributions to the development of computing technologies that improve the accessibility of media and services to people with disabilities. The recipient, Dr. Richard Ladner from the University of Washington, then gave a keynote presentation entitled "Accessibility is Becoming Mainstream."



Figure 1: Presentation of the Outstanding Contribution Award (left to right): SIGACCESS secretary/treasurer Jinjuan Heidi Feng, selection committee member Clayton Lewis, award recipient Richard Ladner, SIGACCESS vice-chair Matt Huenerfauth, and SIGACCESS chair Shari Trewin.

Following the keynote, we had a series of technical paper sessions organized around the following topics: Deaf and Hard of Hearing Users (chaired by Christian Vogler, Gallaudet University), Users with Developmental Disabilities (chaired by Kyle Rector, University of Iowa), and Tactile Information for Blind Users (chaired by Shiri Azenkot, Cornell Tech). The poster sessions during the day featured the accepted poster and demo papers, along with Student Research Competition and SIGACCESS Travel Scholarship recipients. The first day of the conference ended with a reception at the conference hotel.

On Tuesday October 25th, the program continued with sessions on Communication and Aging (chaired by Karyn Moffatt, McGill University), Rehabilitation and Clinical Technologies (chaired by Shaun Kane, University of Colorado Boulder), and Big Data and Blind Users (chaired by Kathy McCoy, University of Delaware). During the afternoon, a special technical paper session (chaired by Adam Sporka, the Czech Technical University in Prague) was held as part of the Text Entry Challenge; this session featuring research in the area of text-entry technologies was dedicated to the memory of Torsten Felzer, a researcher in the SIGACCESS community who passed away earlier this year. The technical portion of the program on Tuesday concluded with an afternoon session containing short talks from the finalists in the ACM Student Research Competition. The morning and afternoon poster sessions on Tuesday included poster and demo papers, along with posters on the topic of text-entry and posters from our Doctoral Consortium participants. After the SIGACCESS Business Meeting at the conference hotel, the day ended with a special reception at the National Automobile Museum, sponsored by Google.

On Wednesday October 26th, the technical program included sessions on Users with Visual Impairments (chaired by Sergio Mascetti, University of Milan), Haptic and Audio Feedback for Blind Users (chaired by Hernisa Kacorri, Carnegie Mellon University), Social Issues and Assistive Technology (chaired by Erin Brady, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis), and Accessibility Education (chaired by Aqueasha Martin-Hammond, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis). After announcing the Best Paper and Best Student Paper Awards at the closing session, we introduced Amy Hurst, the general chair for next year to announce the location of ASSETS 2017 (which will be in Baltimore, Maryland, USA).

A new aspect of the podium presentation sessions this year was that the program chair informed all of the presenters that they might be interrupted during their talks, if there was anything that was inaccessible about their presentation, so that they could clarify the information for the audience. Prior to the conference, detailed instructions had been provided to authors about how to ensure that their talks were accessible (including a video produced by Kyle Rector of the University of Iowa). The conference organizers were pleased to see how much care and effort presenters invested in ensuring that their work was accessible to the diverse participants of our conference.

TACCESS Presentations

Our technical paper sessions this year included six presentations by authors of journal articles accepted to the *ACM Transactions on Accessible Computing (TACCESS)*. This high quality work enriched the technical program, enabling the community to learn more about this recently published work; accepted TACCESS articles submitted during the last year were eligible to be presented at the conference.

Doctoral Consortium

As in prior years of the conference, the Doctoral Consortium event was held on Sunday, prior to the main conference. This year, eleven students were supported by National Science Foundation (NSF) and Google to attend the event. In addition to the Doctoral Consortium co-chairs, a panel of three experts provided feedback and advice to the participants; we thank them for their time and valuable

contributions to the students: Anthony Hornof from the University of Oregon, Christian Vogler from Gallaudet University, and Simon Harper from Manchester University.

Social Program for ASSETS 2016

Following in ASSETS tradition, we wanted to ensure that there was a strong social program to enable participants to meet and network in an informal setting. As was done last year, we organized our poster sessions around coffee breaks so that people can visit posters while they socialize. To avoid participants from feeling rushed, the same posters were available all day (in both the morning and afternoon). In addition, during these coffee breaks, Phil Weaver, a software engineer from Google who works on Android accessibility, offered a demonstration on "Learning to Develop Android Accessibility Services"; he also sought feedback from ASSETS participants about accessibility in the Android platform.

At the end of the first day, we had a reception at the conference hotel. Participants enjoyed appetizers and drinks while they visited posters presented by students from the Alliance for Person-Centered Assistive Technologies (APACT), which is a National Science Foundation funded Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship (IGERT) program at Arizona State University and California State University Long Beach. A large group of students and faculty from this program attended ASSETS 2016. The reception began with a brief presentation by Stewart Tansley from Facebook about TeachAccess, a collaboration between industry and higher education institutions to promote accessibility education in computing degree programs.

At the end of the second day, we arranged a reception at the National Automobile Museum, sponsored by Google, where participants enjoyed a buffet dinner and were able to tour the classic cars exhibits throughout the museum. Guided tours were provided through the exhibit halls (Figure 2), which included re-creations of city streets from various decades of the 20th century.



Figure 2: ASSETS attendees during a guided tour of the National Automobile Museum.

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Dr. Jinjuan Heidi Feng is a professor at the Computer and Information Sciences Department at Towson University. She received a Ph.D. in Information Sciences from UMBC in 2005. She conducts research in the area of universal accessibility, mobile health applications, and accessible security and privacy. She works closely with national and local communities to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities through information technology. Her current research projects focus on assistive technologies for people with cognitive disabilities in educational and professional settings, mobile applications for health related activities, and accessible security techniques for individuals with visual or cognitive disabilities. She is serving on the editorial board of *ACM Transactions on Accessible Computing* and has served on numerous conference program committees and review panels.



Dr. Matt Huenerfauth is an associate professor at The Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) in the Golisano College of Computer and Information Sciences. He is a member of the faculty of the Department of Information Sciences and Technologies and the Ph.D. Program in Computing and Information Sciences. His research focuses on the design of computer technology to benefit people who are deaf or have low levels of written-language literacy, and his laboratory investigates the design and experimental evaluation of American Sign Language technologies. Huenerfauth has secured over \$2.5 million in external research funding to

support his work, including a National Science Foundation CAREER Award in 2008. He has authored 50 peer-reviewed scientific journal articles, book chapters, and conference papers, and he has twice received the Best Paper Award at the *ACM SIGACCESS Conference on Computers and Accessibility (ASSETS)*. He served as the general chair for ASSETS 2012 and as the program chair for ASSETS 2016. Huenerfauth is an editor-in-chief of the *ACM Transactions on Accessible Computing (TACCESS)*, and in 2014, he became a Senior Member of the ACM.