ACL Reviewing Survey Summary

Graham Neubig and Marti Hearst on behalf of the ACL Executive Board
Motivation

- Recent explosion of submissions to *ACL conferences
- How can we maintain an efficient, effective, and equitable review process?
Questions

- **Demographic questions:** submission/reviewing experience, position, gender, location
- **Opinion questions:** author response, author discussion, meta-review, structured review forms, review transparency, acceptance rates, timing of deadlines and review release, and public review + open comments
Logistics / Response

- **Period:** May 6–June 5, 2019
- **Advertised:** Twice on the ACL membership email distribution list as well as on social media.
- **Responses:** 422, 95% of which were from past/present ACL members
- **Demographics:** Approximately match those of ACL membership
Author Response

- The chance for authors to respond to reviews before decisions are made
- Significant majority in favor. Very few strongly opposed.
- Preference for author response was negatively correlated with reviewer experience, and seniority of role.
Author Discussion

- A discussion period between authors and reviewers before decisions
- Opinions were nearly evenly split
- Those who had submitted to a conference with author discussion were more in favor (63-26% vs. 24-37%).
- Those with experience as an Area Chair were more opposed.

Q17: Do you prefer having author discussion for *ACL conferences?

- Strongly favor: 17.4%
- Favor: 20.0%
- Oppose: 22.4%
- Strongly oppose: 9.8%
- No opinion / Not sure: 30.3%
Meta-Review

- A brief summary of reviews written by an AC or PC
- Strong support for meta-reviews (77-9%)
- 73% agreed that it is ok to have them only for borderline cases
- Former PC chairs were split 50%-35% on the latter question
Review Form Structure

- Review forms can vary from a single text box to many fine-grained questions.
- A significant majority supported (65%) a minimal amount of structure in review forms, although a minority (24%) preferred more structure.
- Clear trend that more experienced reviewers preferred less structure.
Review Transparency

- To whom should information about reviews be shared?
- 54% preferred that reviews be released only to authors, but a notable minority of 36% preferred public release of reviews.
Review Transparency by Demographics

- **Experience reviewing**: Those with no experience reviewing more often favored public release of reviews.
- **Gender**: 26% of female respondents approved vs. 40% for those who were male or preferred not to state gender.
- **PC experience**: Those with PC experience were strongly against public release of reviews (only 14% agree).
Post-review Discussion / Meta-review Transparency

- Discussion and meta-review also play an important part in decisions, should they be released?
- 47% preferred that post-review discussion not be released to authors, remaining half split between release to authors and public release.
- 83% support for releasing meta-reviews to authors, 33% also in favor of public release.
- Preference for public release reduced with reviewer experience.

Q28: Post-review discussion should be

- Kept private among reviewers, ACs, and PCs: 47.4%
- Released to authors: 24.2%
- Released to authors, and also the public for acceptance: 20.3%
- No opinion / Not sure: 8.1%

Q29: Meta-reviews (if existing) should be

- Kept private among ACs and PCs: 6.6%
- Released to reviewers only: 4.7%
- Released to reviewers and authors: 50.5%
- Released to reviewers, authors, and the public for acceptance: 33.3%
- No opinion / Not sure: 4.9%
Acceptance Rates

- Near majority (47%) in favor of keeping the status quo acceptance rates, while 32% were in favor of increasing, 9% were in favor of decreasing.

- Strong overall support (83%) for the status quo for conference publications remaining selective.
Timing of Review Release

- The great majority said that the timing between review release and the next conference deadlines was at least somewhat important, (83%-14%)

- People would prefer at least 2-3 weeks, and many (39%) said at least a month was preferable.

- Female respondents slightly preferred having more time between review release and the next deadline.
Public Review

- A review process where papers are public, and the public can comment.

- Opinions mixed: 43% opposed, 32% in favor. 37% held strong opinions.

- Those with experience in conferences with public review tended to favor 50%-30%, those who did not were opposed 27%-47%.
Public Review by Demographics

- **Reviewing experience**: Support for public review inversely correlated with reviewing experience.
- **Gender**: Female respondents were less likely to support public review than male respondents (19%-55% vs. 36%-39%). However, fewer female respondents had experience with public review, so two effects may interact.
Other Comments/Ideas

- Many many ideas in open discussion, see full report! Selection below:

- **Revise-and-resubmit**, with sticky reviews that carry over to the next conference? Prevent submission of minimally/unaltered papers?
- **Space out conferences** more throughout the year, or move to rolling submission cycle?
- **Shorten review cycle** significantly (e.g. 2 weeks) via better automation?
- **OpenReview** (e.g. ICLR) combination of public review/author discussion may be worth trying once, perhaps in lower-stakes setting first?