 RSS Board Meeting: June 20, 2016

Summary of action items:
1. Oliver to make statistical data public
2. Nick to continue to develop a more formal sponsorship model
3. Gaurav to continue tracking the relevant metrics for RSS, and assessing our growth and performance
4. Gaurav to stand up a committee to examine the future of RSS, including (but not limited to) changes to workshops and the problem of systems papers.
5. Nancy to identify a way to carry out unbiased voting.

Summary of primary decisions made:
1. Board changes: Sidd added to foundation board, Pieter added to advisory board. Gaurav to step down from the foundation board, and move to the advisory board. Wolfram and Greg to step down from advisory board.
2. RSS 2017: To be moved from Istanbul to MIT.
3. Early career spotlight: timeline rules modified, and otherwise potential changes left to early career spotlight committee.
4. Review process: RSS will henceforth be always double-blind, including at the area chair level.
5. Double-submissions: Text to be added to the submission process to require originality.

Board Minutes:

1. Location: Ann Arbor, MI, USA

2. Attendance:
   Oliver Brock (chair), Nancy Amato, Greg Dudek, Ryan Eustice, Dieter Fox, David Hsu, Lydia Kavraki, Sertac Karaman, Hadas Kress-Gazit, Nathan Michael, Paul Newman, Ed Olson, Nick Roy, Sidd Srinivasa, Gaurav Sukhatme, Stefan Williams

3. Oliver called the meeting to order at 7:30pm.

4. Approval of Agenda
   Oliver moved to accept the agenda. Unanimous.

5. Approval of 2015 minutes
   Oliver moved to accept the 2015 minutes. Unanimous.

6. RSS board maintenance
   (a) Oliver announced that Gaurav’s term on the RSS foundation board had ended and thanked him for his service.
   (b) Oliver moved to add Gaurav to the RSS advisory board, and add Sidd to the RSS foundation board in his role as the program chair for RSS 2017.
   (c) Oliver moved to add Pieter Abbeel (not present) to the RSS advisory board.
Nick seconded. Unanimous.

At this point, Sidd began participation as a full foundation board member.

Oliver announced that Wolfram Burgard’s (not present) and Greg’s terms on the advisory board had ended. He moved to thank Wolfram and Greg for their outstanding service to the foundation and the conference.

Nick seconded. Unanimous.

7. **Final Report on RSS 2015**

   (a) Oliver reported that RSS 2015 had produced a surplus of $35 USD.
   
   (b) The final registration count was 351 registrations, 3rd after Berkeley (877) and Berlin (426).
   
   (c) Anyone who is interested in the statistics can send Oliver an email, and he will add you to the foundation statistics folder in Google drive.

Oliver moved to accept David’s final report and thank him, Giorgio and Daniele for their service.

Nick seconded. Unanimous.

8. **Report on RSS 2016**

   Ryan reported that as of Monday morning, RSS 2016 had 638 total registrations. He was anticipating a $70K surplus, and planned to make the banquet open bar in order to spend this surplus.

   Oliver reported that the feedback on RSS 2016 was very positive. Nancy reported that we had 228 submissions, which is the second-highest number of submissions after 2010.

   Nick move to thank Ryan, Ed, Nancy and David. Oliver. Unanimous, with general congratulations.

9. **Report on RSS 2017**

   Sertac reported that RSS 2017 is still ready to go in Istanbul if the board feels comfortable proceeding. However, with the recent events in the region, Sertac had also prepared a backup plan, and is ready to proceed with moving RSS 2017 to MIT. He reported that mid-August would be the latest we can delay a decision. He predicted that MIT will draw more people, resulting in a slightly higher budget at MIT, but to first order roughly the same budget for both Istanbul and MIT.

   All thanked Sertac for his work, especially the effort of preparing two separate proposals. Nick moved to hold a vote. No second, motion failed.

   Paul recommended that we value diversity over the risk, and that the robotics community should lead in this regard. Oliver recommended that we act to steward the safety of the RSS attendees. The discussion was debated extensively.

   Nick moved to hold a vote. Oliver seconded. Unanimous.

   Nick moved to hold RSS at MIT. Oliver seconded. 6 in favour, 1 opposed, 3 abstention. Motion carried.

10. **RSS 2018**

    Nate reported that he and Max had down-selected to 3 potential dates and venues for RSS 2017, and was considering either Carnegie Music Hall or Carnegie Library as the main conference site. Nate said he would send out email asking for recommended dates. He also reported they are co-ordinating with the Kerry Forge as a banquet site, and the workshops will be held at CMU.

    Thanks to Nate echoed by all.

11. **RSS foundation: financial report**

    Oliver reported on financial data from Sebastian.

       (a) In 2016, the foundation spent $1000 on services.
(b) The board has current savings of $205,000

(c) The 2016 conference budget is $201K. As a result, we are not quite at the goal of reaching a conference budget in savings, but making progress.

12. Report on action items from last meeting

(a) Spotlight speaker selection process
Dieter reported on the current spotlight speaker process. Matt Mason was the chair for 2016, with 3 members total. The chair is always on the committee for one more year, and then exits. Dieter exited this year, Lydia will be the chair next year. Nominations for committee members next year will be solicited by Oliver.

Oliver moved to thank committee. Nick seconded. Unanimous.

Greg recommended considering geography diversity in the membership, and Lydia agreed to take this under advisement.

At this point in the meeting, the waiter took orders and Oliver moved to have short ribs for dinner. Unanimous approval.

(b) Changes to the Spotlight selection process
Resuming business, Lydia recommended changing the rules for spotlight selection. The current rules are no more than 10 years since PhD and no more than 7 years since faculty appointment. Lydia suggested changing the rules to no less than 3 years since PhD, no more than 10 years since PhD and no more than 7 years since the first research (not faculty) appointment.

Lydia also observed that for the last 3 years, we have ended up selecting people who also won the RAS Early Career Award. The nominations are very polished, but this may not be what we want. Lydia suggested that the selection committee pick 3-4 emphasis areas and pick the best person in the area. Following Greg’s suggestion, the committee could also encourage or even enforce diversity of different areas or geography. The committee is currently focused on picking the best person, and this may also not be what we want.

Dieter added that the Early Career Spotlight is perceived as an award, which reduces flexibility. If it were called the “Spotlight lecture”, the committee could feel free to choose someone in order to highlight an area, and could even be a recent PhD.

Nick observed the quality of nominations is a substantial change in a small amount of time. Gaurav asked if the recency matters if it’s a spotlight – we have keynotes already. Oliver said he’d like to give as much freedom as possible to the committee, but it is indeed nice to have it perceived as an award — it is nice to have junior faculty get recognition.

Sidd further recommended doubling down on the Early Career award, in that we are seeking relevance amongst our peers.

Nick moved to leave the guidance up to the committee. Oliver seconded. Unanimous.

Nick moved to ask the committee to clarify the submission guidelines. No second. Motion failed.

Nick moved to adopt Lydia’s recommendations on timelines. Paul seconded. Unanimous.

(c) Indexing
Stefan reported that RSS is indexed both by Scopus and by Inspec now. He has also updated the website with metadata tags to make it easier for Google scholar to capture data correctly. Greg asked if the impact factor changed. Stefan reported that Scopus takes about a year to index, and there was some delay because the RSS citation rates are so high that Scopus suspected the citations were fraudulent – a strong (if ironic) endorsement of RSS.

Nick reminded Oliver to move to thank Stefan. Unanimous.
(d) Folk memory / lessons learned
Oliver reported that Nick had created a document of lessons learned. It’s 6 pages long, useful. It’s available to all, and end if you send mail to Oliver he can provide access.
Nancy observed statistic and other data from previous years are not available to the public. Oliver agreed to make this data public.
Oliver thanked Nick in a manner that was commensurate with the effort Nick had put in.

(e) RSS metrics
Gaurav reported no progress since last year, but he reminded everyone of what he reported last year. A new analysis is in progress.
Oliver thanked Gaurav for his effort in a manner that was commensurate to his effort.

(f) Sponsorships
Nick very briefly summarized data he had collected on sponsorship. Specifically, various relevant sponsors are not tracking RSS, and we need to build long term relationships with the appropriate people inside the organisation. Different organisations have different needs. Also, we tend to start a little late, and do not provide appropriate reporting that demonstrates the sponsorship value. Nick agreed to develop a new long-term model for sponsorship and communicate it to the board.
Oliver thanked Nick for pushing a new model for optimizing sponsorship.

13. RSS ends in 2019
Oliver moved without discussion that we end RSS in 2019. Nick seconded. 2 in favour. 4 against. 5 abstained. Motion failed.
Oliver recommended create subgroup of people who will examine the issue and make recommendations about the future of RSS, and proposed that Gaurav lead this effort.
Stefan asked for clarification on the justification for assessing the future of RSS, and possibly ending 2019.
Oliver summarised the concerns as: looking at the reviewing process, recruiting more systems papers, considering recruiting position papers that summarize the field. Oliver recognised that an ideal situation might be an RSS where 80% of all papers would be forgotten, but 20% would be landmark papers.
Greg added concerns about coverage of the field and avoiding cliquishness of the field.
Gaurav asked for permission to invite people from the community to the committee.
Oliver agreed. No formal motion taken but Gaurav agreed to lead the sub-committee.

14. Systems papers
Still discussing the topic of RSS’ future, Oliver observed that RSS is having problems recruiting and accepting systems papers. Paul reported that there are our colleagues who have a lab-wise policy against sending their best papers to RSS. Lydia observed that it was a canonically a reviewing problem.
Oliver wondered about a second program committee. Paul felt strongly that a second PC would be unworkable and a second conference would be required, such as separating Systems out and creating RS (Robotics Science) and RS (Robotics Systems).
Sidd observed that he would like for RSS 2017 to have symposia that will highlight certain fields.
Nancy proposed the HRI / CHI model of separate program subcommittees but make final decisions.
Paul observed that it is very important that the leaders of the subcommittees have to transcend the field.
Nick moved to give the problem to Gaurav’s committee. Oliver seconded. Unanimous.
15. **Double-blind review process**

Nancy observed that historically, the people who are making the ultimate decision about the fate of the papers know the identity of the authors. This year it was not known. Nancy observed that EasyChair did not support this model, disaster ensued.

Nancy moved to enforce double-blind decision-making at the area chair level. Oliver seconded. 10 in favour. 1 opposed. Motion carried.

Nick moved that the foundation require that RSS is always double bind, and this includes at the area chair level. Oliver seconded. 10 in favour. 1 opposed.

(a) Double-submissions

Nancy reported that 5% of papers were simultaneously submitted to RSS and other conferences.

Oliver moved that appropriate text be added to the submission process that states the requirement of originality. Stefan seconded. Unanimous.

(b) Potential notification of department chair in case of double-submission and plagiarism

Nick moved to do nothing, but monitor these. Nancy amended to ask the program chair to actively look for these cases. Greg seconded. Unanimous.

16. **Possible changes to the conference**

Oliver suggested that Gaurav’s new subcommittee consider the following modifications to the conference:

(a) Invited position papers
(b) Add citable comments to (selected) papers?
(c) Videos
(d) Gordon Research Conference
(e) Dagstuhl-type conference

Sidd described his ideas for RSS 2017, including RSS symposia to reduce bias on particular topics, and to encourage specific topics. The symposia are four or five topics that occur in parallel. The symposia review process is identical to the main conference, possibly with selected area chairs. All papers are archival. When the call for papers goes out, these papers will be solicited and the submission can choose to be part of a symposium. Hopefully will increase the number of submission, number of accepted papers, breadth of topics in the conference.

Dieter suggested eliminating the symposium name. Sidd said he was riffing off the AAAI idea, but the name “symposium” not required.

Nick observed that logistical issues may prevent symposia at many instances of the conference.

There was extensive discussion about experiments we can try with workshops, including the number of days of workshops, disallowing people to be invited speakers at multiple workshops. Several people expressed surprise at the importance of workshops at RSS.

No motion made, no decisions made.

17. **RSS Voting**

Nancy observed that current (usually public) voting system on various issues induces bias.

Nick moved that we ask Nancy to identify a website that supports an unbiased voting process. Oliver seconded. Unanimous.

18. **New face for the proceedings site**

Oliver said a few brief things about updating the proceedings website, as feedback from the indexing service indicated that the proceedings website lacks in appearance and functionality. No major decision taken.
19. **Open discussion**

   Oliver moved to adjourn. Nick second. Unanimous.

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Meeting minutes respectfully submitted,

[Signature]

Nicholas Roy, RSS Foundation Secretary