Minutes: RSS board meeting July 12, 2017

Location: Cambridge, MA, USA

Attendance: Julie Adams, Nancy Amato, Antonio Bicchi, Wolfram Burgard, Oliver Brock (chair), Ryan Eustice, Dieter Fox, David Hsu, Sertac Karaman, Leslie Pack Kaelbling, Hadas Kress-Gazit, Matt Mason, Paul Newman, Nick Roy, Daniela Rus, Sidd Srinivasa, Gaurav Sukhatme, Stefan Williams

Action items:

1. **Board (Oliver):** Talk to Sebastian about the possibility that RSS will not end in 2020. Discover whether he is willing to continue as treasurer.
2. **Hadas (as next PC):** Look at ways to increase and diversify the topics submitted to RSS.
3. **Nate:** RSS 2018 - Look into accommodating a larger conference attendance than was expected when the venue was chosen.
4. **Gaurav:** stand up a committee to examine the future of RSS, or find someone else to do it.
5. **Gaurav:** track metrics and report next board meeting, or find someone else to do it.
6. **Nancy:** Suggest an implementation for a ranking system for board votes.
7. **Nick:** Share slides regarding funding with the board.
8. **Nick:** write guidelines for how to approach and cultivate sponsorships.
9. **Daniela and Matt:** come up with a process to implement an RSS impact award.
10. **Oliver:** Look into creating a federated robotics conference with WAFR, HRI, CORL, RSS, ISER, ISRR, FSR, Haptics.

Major decisions:

1. RSS 2019 will take place in Freiburg, Germany. RSS 2020 will take place in Corvallis, Oregon, USA.
2. Board changes: Hadas joins foundation board as secretary, Sertac joins foundation board, Jeff and Nick retire from foundation board and join advisory board, Daniela and Matt leave advisory board. Sebastian’s term as treasurer extended by 7 years under the understanding that RSS will continue.
3. Voting on the board will be implemented using a ranking system.

Minutes:

1. **Item 6 on the agenda:** Proposals for RSS 2019 venue:
   - OSU – Julie Adams and Bill smart – Julie presented. CoRIS institute. June 23-28 or July 14-19, 2019. Other dates for 2020. Airport – Portland + shuttle service to Corvallis, can increase number if need be (1.5 hours), also Eugene (~40 min away). Workshops can be at the beginning or end. No conflicts with summer school. Local industry – UAV, HP, Tech in Portland. Julie and Bill ran HRI in Portland.

2. Item 2 on the agenda: Approve minutes from 2016 – approved unanimously

3. Item 8 on the agenda: Foundation board maintenance

Gaurav suggested voting separately on Sebastian.

Motion: Foundation board maintenance:
   a. vote new program chair onto the board as secretary – Hadas
   b. vote new board member onto foundation board – Sertac
   c. commendation for the retiring foundation board member – Jeff
   d. commendation for the retiring secretary – Nick

Motion passed unanimously

Discussion regarding extending Sebastian’s term as treasurer by 7 years: concerns were raised regarding his belief that RSS should end in 2020. The need to talk to him about the possibility that RSS will not be terminated in 2020 was raised.

Motion: Extend Sebastian’s term as treasurer by 7 years under the understanding that RSS will continue. Motion passed unanimously

4. Item 9 on the agenda: Advisory board maintenance

Motion: Advisory board maintenance:
   a. vote retiring foundation board member onto the advisory board – Jeff, Nick
   b. commendation for the two leaving advisory board members – Matt and Daniela

Motion passed unanimously

5. Item 3 on the agenda: Final report for RSS 2016 – Ryan

Report was circulated to the board. RSS 2016 made $65K in profit.

Motion: Gaurav moved that the board thanks Ryan and all the organizers for a well-run conference. Nick seconded. Motion passed unanimously

6. Item 4 on the agenda: status report for RSS 2017 – Sertac and Sidd

Sertac reported that as of the board dinner RSS had 940 registrations + 40 volunteers and press. The conference is looking at ~$540K in revenue and a large profit is expected.

Sidd reported that RSS received 206 submissions, and accepted 75 papers (37% acceptance rate). Sidd implemented new review policies and had 286 reviewers (largest ever, most post PhD), each reviewer had at most 3 papers to review leading to a low reviewing load. There were 30 ACs – each paper had 3 ACs responsible for it, one primary and two secondary ACs. In terms of topics, it was observed that
Mechanisms and Control were underrepresented – Sidd made specific efforts to encourage submissions. ACs were selected to encourage submission and ACs were asked to solicit papers. In terms of Systems papers, around 12 were accepted (more from the mechanisms field).

A discussion regarding RSS in general ensued:

Concern were raised about flat number of submissions across the years. Sidd mentioned that hopefully accepting more papers will help increase the number of submissions. Paul asked whether it will help to move the submission date a bit to be later in the year.

Matt: How was the distribution of papers? Answer: corresponds to trends and efforts in increasing participation in specific fields. Action item to increase/diversify submissions.

Leslie: is there an explicit move to change topics? – Answer: no, just encouraging underrepresented ones.

How to encourage participation and submission from young students? Worries about students not submitting because of randomness and noise. Students are afraid to submit their best work.

A concern was raised whether the young ACs are too critical.

Leslie: Workshops should be used as a venue to encourage young people to present. Maybe accept conference and workshop papers. Maybe at review time divert papers to workshops? It is better for students to present longer presentation to a focus audience.

Paul: Should we go to a multi track conference?

Motion: Nick moves to have the next PC look at ways to make the workshops archival. As a way to increase submission and participation. Gaurav seconded. Motion failed.

Julie: HRI and CHI have two different proceedings types (regular, late breaking)

Paul: should we employ someone to have institutional memory and help with “marketing”?

Sidd and Nancy: the conference review process was made truly double blind, ACs and reviewers did not know each other. No pulling rank. Everything anonymous.

David: this is related to the symposia idea. One day RSS symposia, 3 tracks. accepted as regular papers.

Gaurav: ratio of acceptance to attendees/paper. ICRA is ~2-3, RSS is ~10. Why these extremes? Leslie: because of size.

Nancy: why are we unhappy with the number of submissions?

Antonio: conference doing well but not so many submissions. Common wisdom – it is mostly CS. Why is robotics growing – because of asia. Perception is that RSS is an “American conference”. Need to be careful about “rerouting” rejected papers to the workshops. Don’t want to ruin the workshops. Gaurav’s ratio is a good thing, just need to increase the submissions. Should keep reputation of a “tough” conference. Opinion is that it is “strange” reviews. “worst paper gets in, not the best paper”. Indexing in scopus (it is indexed now)
Daniela: RSS has the perception that a paper has to be a lot more mature. Innovation and creativity is less appreciated.

Julie: is there a “formula” to RSS paper: Sidd: not as bad as HRI.

Stefan: a lot of positive – students are submitting, great attendance, not so bad...

Nancy: agree with Stefan. Doing better in the systems papers area. Reaching out to communities is a good thing to do in underrepresented areas. Workshops are great, already vibrant. Do not want to recreate ICRA/IROS

7. **Item 5 on the agenda:** status report for RSS 2018 – Hadas covering for Nate whose flight was delayed.
   Slides were presented. Concerns were raised about the size of the venue (seats 612 people). Nate will look into options. It was commented that it would be good to have rooms sponsors can use.

8. **Item 10 on the agenda:** Brief discussion regarding the preference for exciting papers and not “polished” papers.

9. **Item 12 on the agenda:** Report of action items from last meeting
   c. Future of RSS: no committee was created, no report.
   b. Voting on the board: Nancy reported that she suggests the board move to a ranking system. Leslie mentioned the Australian voting system.
   
   **Motion:** Nancy moves the board change the voting scheme to a ranking system. Daniela seconded. Motion passed unanimously
   a. Report on funding: Nick created slides that will be shared with the board. Sponsorship has been fixed (used to be bad). Nick is the sponsorship Tzar. More repeatable but not less work. Nick will write guidelines for next year. Sponsors want to talk with students and want access to attendees. Need consent (opt in) to provide information. Should RSS have a Career fair? Resume book? It would be useful to have a Bulletin board and booking rooms to do events. Board has info about events organized by industry. Nick commented that there is a clear need for booths where sponsors can set up. The board thanked Nick for working on streamlining sponsorship and funding.
   d. Metrics: no report. Coupled with non-existent committee. Gaurav tries to do it next year or finds someone else.

10. **Item 14 on the agenda:** Impact award
    Oliver brought up the idea of creating an impact award. A discussion ensued regarding possible criteria such as most cited RSS paper from 10 years ago or decision by a committee. Daniela and matt to come up with a process.

11. **Item 16 on the agenda:** End RSS in 2019?
    Nick: it served its purpose (changes the tone and reviewing of ICRA and IROS). Wolfram: invented RSS to increase the quality of robotics conferences but always need to reevaluate. Happy to review the conference but a lot of people are happy about it. Matt: not “challenge-overcame it- suicide”
but rather “challenge-overcame it – what is the next challenge”. Dieter – we are serving a community, not owning it. We cannot decide unilaterally to end it. Daniela: it is remarkable that people just attend even without having a paper accepted. No need to drop the floor from under them. RSS is adapting and changing over time. Gaurav: should keep RSS, if it sucks, people will do other things (for example CORL). Stefan: board turnover is used to reinvigorate the conference.

12. **Item 17 on the agenda:** The creation of CORL – new conference on robot learning
   Oliver raised concerns that the new conference was created in response to RSS. Daniela: not competing with RSS, just a focused area. The idea of creating a joint robotics conference (federation) for WAFR, HRI, CORL, RSS, ISER, ISRR, FSR, Haptics etc. was raised. Oliver will look into it

13. **Item 18 on the agenda:** RSS has surplus money beyond the ~350K cushion the board would like to maintain in case of conference cancellation. What should we do with the rest of the money?
   It was commented that there should be policies of what to do with the money if RSS is ended. Regarding the current surplus, Hadas: spend ~25K on travel grants for junior people (undergrads, 1st year PhDs) from underrepresented groups. Oliver: collect a list of suggestions and prioritize. Paul: 40 free rides to RSS – announced ahead of time – might increase submissions. Gaurav: numbers are high anyway. Wolfram: free registration for student submission. Limited number? Oliver: highlights (sister) track. Paul: all accepted papers can send a student for free (registration + some travel?) Nick: will not help in submissions. Nancy: submit a paper and get a discount for registration. Nancy: travel grants for faculty from developing countries. Gaurav: subsidize student registrations
   From now on, conferences should break even.

The board meeting was adjourned at 10:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Hadas Kress-Gazit, RSS Foundation Secretary