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SAIS CELEBRATES 10 YEARS: A HISTORICAL SUMMARY OF THE SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION FOR INFORMATION SYSTEMS CONFERENCES FROM 1998 -2006

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Abstract

The Southern Association for Information Systems (SAIS) celebrates 10 years as the first regional chapter of AIS in the southeastern United States. The purpose of this paper is to provide a historical narrative of how the conference began and summary information taken from the conference proceedings regarding the number of papers presented, location of each conference, institutions represented, and leadership of the organization.

Keywords: SAIS, Southern Association for Information Systems, conference publications, conference history, organization profile

Introduction

The spring of 2007 marks the 10th anniversary of the Southern Association for Information Systems (SAIS) conference. During the past decade the organization has held annual conferences in the southeastern United States, beginning with the first conference in Atlanta, Georgia, during the spring of 1998. SAIS is the first regional chapter of the Association for Information Systems (AIS), and for many years was the only regional chapter.

This paper summarizes all the proceedings from the 1998 conference in Atlanta to the 2006 conference in Jacksonville, Florida, and includes a report of the papers presented, location of each conference, institutions represented, and participants involved. For practical reasons, all of this year's conference information is not included. The paper begins however with a historical narrative of how the organization began and the key individuals who shaped it.

History

The Southern Association for Information Systems (SAIS) has the distinction of being the first regional chapter of the Association of Information Systems (AIS), and was created in concept, during a meeting in December of 1997 by leaders of AIS and several seasoned Information Systems faculty in the southeast. The AIS organization itself, which is considered to be the premier global organization for Information Systems academics, was created just a few years before in 1994.

The bulk of the credit for facilitating the formation of AIS's inaugural chapter goes to Ephraim McLean, the executive director of AIS. Eph began suggesting a southeastern regional chapter well in advance of the first SAIS conference in 1998. His vision was to merge several existing IS academic groups that had been conducting annual conferences during the early and mid-1990s. These included GRITS (Georgia Research in Information Technology and Systems) in Georgia, SMISA (the Southern Management Information Systems Association) which drew its conference attendees primarily from Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi, and FLORIS which focused on bringing together IS academics in Florida. By 1996, Eph was actively lobbying the conference coordinators of each group to consider forming a regional chapter. For example, he achieved buy-in from Dr. Charles Snyder, a key

player in SMISA, who, in turn, was successful in getting this professional association to endorse the concept of merging with GRITS and FLORIS to create a regional chapter of AIS.

In December, 1997, during the ICIS Conference, Eph arranged a meeting of key representatives from SMISA and GRITS. SMISA was represented by Shane Sharpe (University of Alabama), Charles Snyder (Auburn University), Brian Reithel (University of Mississippi) and Chuck Litecky (who was then on the faculty at Mississippi State University). GRITS was represented by Eph McLean (Georgia State University) and Thomas Case (Georgia Southern University). A decision was reached at this meeting to begin the process of forming a regional chapter of the Association of Information Systems and to hold its first conference in April, 1998 at the Hilton in downtown Atlanta. Chuck Litecky agreed to develop the by-laws for SAIS. Shane Sharpe agreed to serve as conference coordinator and Proceedings Editor. Brian Reithel agreed to develop a Web site for the conference. Tom Case agreed to serve as program chair and to oversee the paper submission and review processes. Eph McLean agreed to handle local arrangements with the hotel. In essence, SAIS was birthed at this meeting in December 1997, and Eph McLean either served as father or midwife, or both.

In discussing the progress of the organization it is also helpful to examine the leadership of various individuals over the years in organizing the conference and maintaining the visibility of SAIS. As with any conference, it takes the service of many individuals to make it successful. Table 1 provides a summary of those individuals who served as President, Vice-President/Local Conference Chair, Program Chair, and Proceedings editor for each of the years.

TABLE 1: SAIS Officers (1998 – 2007)

	President	VP/Conference Chair	Program Chair	Proceedings
1998	*1	Shane Sharpe	Tom Case	Shane Sharpe
1999	Shane Sharpe	Tom Case	Amelia Baldwin	Camille Rogers
2000	Tom Case	Amelia Baldwin	Camille Rogers	Camille Rogers
2001	Amelia Baldwin	Camille Rogers	Max Burns	Camille Rogers
2002	William Lomerson	Max Burns	Kathryn Kimery	Carol Waller
2003	Max Burns	Kathryn Kimery	Craig Van Slyke	Carol Waller
2004	Kathryn Kimery	Craig Van Slyke	Raymond Papp	Christy Williams
2005	Craig Van Slyke	Raymond Papp	John Dyer	Christy Williams
2006	Raymond Papp	Meg Murray	Meg Murray	Meg Murray
2007	Meg Murray	Russell Baker	Roland Weistroffer	Roland Weistroffer

*1 - No official president is listed in the proceedings

Beginning in 2002, the proceedings has regularly identified five elected board members, in addition to the officers, who also contribute in various ways to the success of the group. As outlined by the by-laws and as is evident by the names presented in Table 1, the natural succession of the officers begins with one serving as Program Chair, moving the next year to VP/Conference Chair, to President, and then on to the board as Past President. This pattern has typically been followed each year with few exceptions, due to various circumstances.

Research Questions and Methodology

The authors examined 9 years of SAIS proceedings, including 1998 – 2006 in an attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. Has the conference been successful in establishing itself and to what degree has it grown based on the number of papers presented?
2. Which institutions appeared frequently at the annual conference and is there a trend regarding conference location?

Data Analysis

While the decision to establish SAIS was a good one, the decision to hold a conference in April 1998 with only four months to distribute a call for papers, solicit manuscripts, reviewers, session chairs, and produce a printed proceedings may not have been as wise. Despite the short lead time, the conference succeeded in attracting 25 papers and drew attendees from 14 states, the District of Columbia, and several other countries.

Summary of Conference Papers (RQ #1)

The first research question the authors would like to resolve is to what degree has the conference grown, based on the number of papers presented? Table 2 summarizes the conference information found in the annual proceedings (SAIS 1998-2006) and includes the number of papers presented each year, the location of the conference and the month in which the conference was held.

TABLE 2: Summary of SAIS Conference Locations and Papers

Year	Number of Papers Presented	Conference Location	Month
1998	25	Atlanta	April
1999	35	Atlanta	April
2000	30	Atlanta	Mar/April
2001	36	Savannah	March
2002	49	Savannah	March
2003	65	Savannah	March
2004	57	Savannah	February
2005	53	Savannah	February
2006	47	Jacksonville, FL	March
2007	*	Jacksonville, FL	March

** Information not known at time of publication*

As can be seen from Table 2, Atlanta was the site of the SAIS conference for the first few years during the month of April. Participation in the SAIS conference grew modestly during these early years, increasing from 25 papers the first year to 30 paper presentations in the year 2000.

Due to persistent urging of Eph McLean and the willingness of the faculty at Georgia Southern University to coordinate local arrangements and handle the proceedings, SAIS moved to Savannah for its fourth through eighth annual conferences (2001 – 2005). This resulted in a 20% increase in conference participation during the first year alone. The numbers continued to increase to a high of 65 paper presentations in 2003, more than doubling the paper totals presented in Atlanta. It is also worth noting that the timing of the conference moved up slightly from the middle of April (while in Atlanta) to the first week of March (while in Savannah). It appears that by the sixth anniversary, SAIS had established itself as a viable, regional conference for Information Systems faculty in the southeast.

The 2006 conference (9th year) moved to Jacksonville, Florida and the number of paper presentations showed a slight decrease down to 47 from the 53 the year before. The 2007 conference (10th anniversary) will also be held in the same location, and the data is yet unknown as to the number of paper presentations, as they are being submitted

concurrently with this report. Future conference locations are yet to be determined, but it has already been discussed that the conference will rotate on a regular basis to other sites within the southeast.

Institutional Representation (RQ # 2)

The second research question the authors would like answered is which institutions have the highest representation each year and is there a trend given the conference location? The universities listed in Table 3 indicate the top number of papers presented that year by a particular institution. Not all universities are listed, particularly if there is only one paper presented.

TABLE 3: Top Institutions Represented by Number of Papers

Year	University (# of Papers)	Conference Location
1998	Georgia State University (4) Appalachian State University (2) Georgia Southern University (2)	Atlanta, GA
1999	Georgia State University (8) Auburn University (4) Georgia Southern University (3) Northeast Louisiana University (3)	Atlanta, GA
2000	Auburn University (3) Georgia State University (3) Georgia Southern University (2) Kennesaw State University (2) University of Arizona (2) University of South Alabama (2)	Atlanta, GA
2001	Georgia Southern University (9) State University of New York (3) Florida State University (2) Georgia State University (2) Kennesaw State University (2) Univ. of North Carolina – Wilmington (2)	Savannah, GA
2002	Georgia Southern University (4) Georgia College & State University (4) University of Georgia (3) Kennesaw State University (3) University of Memphis (3) Appalachian State University (2) Georgia State University (2) Purdue University (2) University of Central Florida (2)	Savannah, GA
2003	University Central Florida (8) Kennesaw State University (5) Auburn University (4) Claremont Graduate University (4) Universidad Simon Bolivar (4) Georgia Southern University (3) University of Georgia (3)	Savannah, GA
2004	Georgia Southern University (8) University of Georgia (8) Kennesaw State University (7) University of Central Florida (6)	Savannah, GA

	University of Tampa (5) Claremont Graduate University (4) East Carolina University (3) Appalachian State University (2) Auburn University (2)	
2005	East Carolina University (5) Georgia Southern University (5) Kennesaw State University (5) University of Central Florida (5) University of Georgia (5) Georgia State University (4) University of Tampa (4) Georgia College & State University (2)	Savannah, GA
2006	Kennesaw State University (6) Georgia Southern University (4) Jacksonville University (4) Clemson University (3) University of Alabama (3) University of Central Florida (3) University of Memphis (3) University of Tampa (3) Auburn University (2) Savannah State University (2)	Jacksonville, FL

In reviewing the data provided in Table 3, there is clear evidence that the location impacts representation from institutions within the vicinity of the conference. The first three years the conference was in Atlanta, Georgia State University had a collective total of 15 papers, and Auburn University presented 8 (includes 1 paper from 1998). Georgia Southern University was close behind with a total of 7 paper presentations for the first three years. All three of these institutions are within 4 hours or less driving time.

When the conference moved to Savannah for the next 5 years, there was a similar trend, in addition to a growth. Georgia Southern University presented a total of 29 papers collectively over the five year period. Other institutions with high representation and within a 4 hour driving distance include Kennesaw State University (22), University of Central Florida (21), and the University of Georgia (19).

In 2005, the relocation of the conference to Jacksonville saw an immediate increase in the papers presented by the local institution of Jacksonville University from 1 the previous year to 4 in that year.

Over the years, SAIS has striven to be a student friendly conference, and to a large extent, it has been successful. Many of the institutions represented include traditional doctoral programs in Information Systems. Numerous Ph.D. students in the Southeast have presented their first papers at SAIS and the organization has sporadically included doctoral consortia in an effort to attract Ph.D. students to the annual conferences. SAIS has also provided a forum for Masters and undergraduate students to present papers.

Conclusions

The data extracted from an examination of the 9 years of SAIS conference proceedings have provided sufficient evidence to answer the two research questions posed by the authors.

First, the conference has established itself over the past decade, and has increased considerably from the initial meeting in Atlanta. Second, the institutions represented at the conference have increased, with regional schools showing a larger number of paper presentations when the conference is within a local driving distance. Georgia Southern University, with its close proximity to all three conference locations thus far, leads the way with a grand total of 40 conference papers in 9 years of conferences.

Papers falling into a wide range of topical categories have been presented at SAIS conferences. Pedagogical, curricular, and instructionally-oriented papers have consistently been well represented on SAIS programs. This has

led the AIS SIGED: IAIM to target SAIS as a venue for a future mini-track. Overall, the categorical range and topical diversity of papers that have presented at SAIS suggest that the chapter is viable and well-positioned for the future.

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