# UMIACS Faculty Presentation and Discussion on Web Presence

## *Scribe: Carl Kingsford*

Adam Porter presented the findings of the web presence committee consisting of himself, Ben Bederson, Jeff Hollingsworth, and David Jacobs. A wide-ranging discussion ensued.

- Deficiencies of the current UMIACS web pages were noted, including that it is not frequently updated, is too long, doesn't emphasize exciting science, and doesn't support search. The UMIACS web pages were contrasted with those from a peer institution, CITRIS (Center for Information Technology Research in the Interest of Society, http://citris-uc.org/), which highlights science problems such as helping physicians work remotely, includes social media integration (Twitter, Facebook) and multimedia presentations (YouTube), supports search, uses a content management system in a more modern layout, and makes the focus on big science and the people doing it more apparent.
- A discussion about who would be responsible for maintaining such a website for UMIACS was conducted. It was noted that it should be the responsibility of all the faculty to help produce content because the job would be too much for one person. The goal should be a content management system that makes it easy for individual faculty to add content. A suggestion was also made that each lab or center have a designated person responsible for ensuring newsworthy web items for that center be produced and input into the system. ISR was mentioned as a model where a central communications director has the job to keep web content fresh and to remind faculty once per semester to pass along newsworthy items. In addition, Ted Knight (ECE) was mentioned several times as having put together an exemplary model of a communications process, particularly at communicating technical results to non-technical people.
- Questions were raised about who currently visits the web page and what search terms people are using to get there, and who our intended audience is. Amitabh Varshney mentioned that we currently don't have web analytics on the website and said that one goal is to install such analytics on the new website to find out how people are using the site now. It was mentioned that we should attempt to improve the website to give it some reasonable organization even if we don't yet have good information about how it will be used and by whom.
- The question was raised about what had been decided at previous conversations about the web presence and what progress had been made. Adam Porter noted that he gave a very similar talk about the web presence 3 or 4 years ago at the last retreat. At that time a

prototype database and CMS using Zope was built, and it was found to be buggy and to not scale well. It was felt that the technology at the time required more resources to support than we had, but that now the tools are better.

- The desired goals of the website were addressed, including to: increase awareness of members; improve reputation of members as researchers who solve problems that are important to society; increase funding opportunities; increase member productivity and collaborations;  better communicate what UMIACS is and its mission; maintain a centralized calendar system.

- Further, Amitabh stated that his goal was that UMIACS should provide a web infrastructure that supports the efforts of individual members and labs to develop their web presence. One suggestion was made that the UMIACS page be a simple landing page that just pointed to individual labs and that the focus be on improving the infrastructure.  It was noted that "web presence" is not the same as "website," and that the goal is really a platform that helps faculty use their content better.  For example, a publications database could be maintained by UMIACS but used in the various labs' websites and also facilitate links between related research across labs.  Doug Oard mentioned that he and colleagues had created a system for the VPR that searched papers that had been entered into the FAR, and that this could be extended into a more general publication database. Subsequently, it was noted that a problem with using the FAR is that the data is unstructured.

- Throughout the discussion questions were raised about whether the UMIACS website is important, since it is two levels removed from individual faculty's project pages and that most people are searching for individual groups or faculty web pages rather than UMIACS as a unit. The view that the web page is not particularly important was expressed, and that the research enterprise is what is most important. The target research community is generally very narrow and that, while the UMIACS web page is poor, a poor web page likely doesn't really affect the research enterprise.  It was further suggested that everyone should produce a high-quality web page on their own, rather than waiting for UMIACS to do it in a centralized way.

- A number of people expressed the viewpoint that the UMIACS web page could help with faculty and PhD student recruiting and general awareness of UMIACS and ought to contain information for the university administrators and industry. It was noted that outside groups often don't have problems that fit neatly into individual labs and a unified website could help them identify UMIACS as a relevant partner.

- It was mentioned that the websites of individual labs could be mined for ideas to improve both other lab's websites and the main UMIACS website.  For example, the CLIP lab's website was felt to be essential for recruiting good people to their group.  The HCIL website has a database and basic content management system along with a server-side include making a consistent menu appear on every HCIL webpage.  While a central person manages

the HCIL homepage, most of the content and each HCIL project page are managed by individual faculty. This was felt to be reasonable because scientists ought to spend time communicating their work.

- A discussion of desired website content was conducted. Suggested content: This week's awards, profiles of researchers (in text or videos), publications, talk archives, a Wisconsin-like 5-minute lecture series, "about us" pages, Twitter feeds for a #UMIACS hash tag, and social network sharing buttons. A "Director's Blog" was proposed that could highlight news. A search facility that could link keywords such as "machine learning" to various groups that use such techniques was also proposed. It was stressed that content needs to be self-sustaining and it needs to be easy for the members to add and update items, items should auto-expire to avoid stale content, and that some materials need to be prepared in advance so that important events can be quickly responded to. The view was also raised that it might be better to have more, quickly created content rather than high-quality professional content. For example, the value of professionally created profiles was questioned as the profile might quickly fall out of date. The sentiment was echoed as the desire to avoid letting the "perfect be the enemy of the good" and that a tweaked website might be better than waiting a long time for a complete redesign.

- A #UMIACS hash tag feed for the main webpage was suggested. A poll was conducted for how many people would be comfortable tweeting about their research and about 20-25 people indicated they would be (a smaller number of 10-15 indicated that they probably would actually do it). Tweets and a strong web presence were noted as being important to help generate press in magazines such as WIRED or MIT Technology Review.

- The desired infrastructure services were discussed, including: linking to campus databases about grants and FAR; a programmatic API to extract entered content; podcast creation support; software repositories; an "app store" for research software; comment support for papers. A service for distributing large data sets using low-cost object storage was discussed and was felt to be useful for satisfying NSF data management plan. A "talk capture" service for external speakers was requested, based perhaps on the University's class capture system. The view was expressed that class capture doesn't produce videos of high enough quality for external publication, but it may be appropriate for internal distribution.

- One action item is for faculty members to send structured bibliography information about their publications (Endnote, BibTeX, etc) to **pubs@umiacs.umd.edu**. These publications will seed a database of UMIACS publications, which will have the ability to be updated easily.