Mexican International Colloquium on Computational Creativity

Rafael Pérez y Pérez

Departamento de Tecnologías de la Información, División de Ciencias de la Comunicación y Diseño
Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Cuajimalpa
CDMX, México
rperez@correo.cua.uam.mx   www.rafaelperezyperez.com

Abstract

This paper describes the story of the Mexican International Colloquium on Computational Creativity, which has been carried out for 14 years. I describe the activities around this academic event and present a list of all invited speakers. I finish with some thoughts about the experience of organizing this Colloquium.

Introduction

The Autonomous Metropolitan University at Cuajimalpa (UAM Cuajimalpa) is a public University that mostly provides education to students that belongs to families with low incomes. One of its main goals is to promote interdisciplinary research. Currently, the University offers the only postgraduate program in the country where the fields of design, sciences of human communications and computer science converge (this is a two years, full time master course). Because computational creativity (CC) is a great example of interdisciplinary collaboration, I have been organizing for 14 years what I call the *Mexican International Colloquium on Computational Creativity* (http://www.rafaelperezyperez.com/coloquio-internacional-creatividad-computacional/). This academic meeting pursues five main goals:

1. To promote the study and research on CC.
2. To make our local community aware about the importance of CC in society.
3. To reflect about how technology is changing the world.
4. To learn about successful interdisciplinary projects.
5. To allow students to establish contact with top researchers in the field.

The Colloquium was held for the first time at Center for Applied Sciences at the National University (UNAM) in 2002, where I used to work. Despite its success, the authorities did not support the event and became impossible to organize a second edition. In those years, some colleagues were shocked that I was promoting the study of creativity using computers; some senior researchers at that Center strongly recommended that I focused on "normal topics that included mathematics". Two years later my contract was not renewed.

In 2007, with the support of the authorities at UAM Cuajimalpa, my new academic home, it was feasible to return to organize the Colloquium. Since then, it has been carried out annually without interruption. For the first eight years, the Coordination of Postgraduate Studies in Computer Science and Engineering at UNAM, where I was an invited lecturer, supported the event. However, in 2015, they decided to stop sponsoring the Colloquium, expressing doubts about how useful CC research was for the students. That year, the National Council of Science and Technology in México (CONACYT) funded my research project in CC that included financial support to continue organizing the Colloquium. The Division of Design and Science of Human Communication at UAM Cuajimalpa also backed the event.

Researchers from Europe, the United States and Latin America have participated in this academic reunion. We feel lucky that we have been able to listen to recognized scientists in computational creativity and related areas. In the next sections I explain the general organization of the meeting and provide some thoughts about the experience of organizing fourteen editions of this Colloquium.

The Colloquium

The Colloquium takes place once a year at the end of October or beginning of November, coinciding with the famous Mexican celebration of the Day of Death.

Through all these years, 28 top researchers in CC and related areas have partaken in the event; Pablo Gervás has the record of more participations with four contributions, followed by Nick Montfort with three contributions, Mike Sharples and Michael Mateas with two, and the rest with one participation (see Table 1).

The Colloquium consists of a series of master lectures given by the invited speakers. Each year, one theme is chosen as the focus of discussion: automatic writing, automatic

design, interactive systems, learning, emotional music generation, painting, interdisciplinary collaboration, social concerns, cognitive approaches, videogames, language, creative collaboration, e-literature, inclusive AI.

Thus, the perspectives, approaches, methodologies, an areas of research exposed through all these years have been vast. The reader can watch some of these lectures in the web page of the Colloquium.

Year	Topic	Guests
2002	Creativity in writing	Mike Sharples
2007	Design	John Gero Pablo Gervás Paula Montoya
2008	Interactive systems	Pablo Gervás Brian Magerko Nick Montfort Mark Riedl
2009	Automatic narrative generation in learning	Mike Sharples Liz Beaty Pablo Gervás Michael Mateas
2010	CC as an example of interdisciplinary collaboration	Graeme Ritchie Dan Ventura Nick Montfort
2011	Painting and Games research	Simon Colton Michael Young
2012	Music	Amílcar Cardoso
2013	Social concerns	Sneha Veeragoudar Harrell Fox Harrell Nick Montfort
2014	Cognitive perspectives	Mark Turner Tony Veale Geraint Wiggins
2015	Videogames	Clara Fernández Vara Pablo Gervás Michael Mateas
2016	Language	Anna Jordanous Paolo Rosso Juan Manuel Torres
2017	Creative collaboration with Intelligent systems that compose music	Maya Ackerman
2018	e-Literatures	Alex Saum Carlos León
2019	Inclusive literature in the era of AI	Milton Läufer Mario Silva

Table 1. List of speakers at the Colloquium.

Year	Name	Title	Hours
2013	Nick Montfort	Exploratory Programming Workshop	6
2015	Clara Fernández Vara	Creating Fictional Worlds for Games	8
2016	Anna Jordanous	Making computers that can communicate creatively	3
2016	Paolo Rosso	Automatic analysis of user profiles on social networks	3
2017	Maya Ackerman	The Computer as a Creative Partner	3
2018	Alex Saum	Home electronic literature: tools to develop computational creativity in our daily practices	3
2018	Carlos León	Experiencing computational creativity: generating stories just like a computer	3
2019	Mario Silva	Literary workshop: "Letters with Smoke and Sweet"	1.5
2019	Milton Läufer	A practical approach to computational literature	1.5

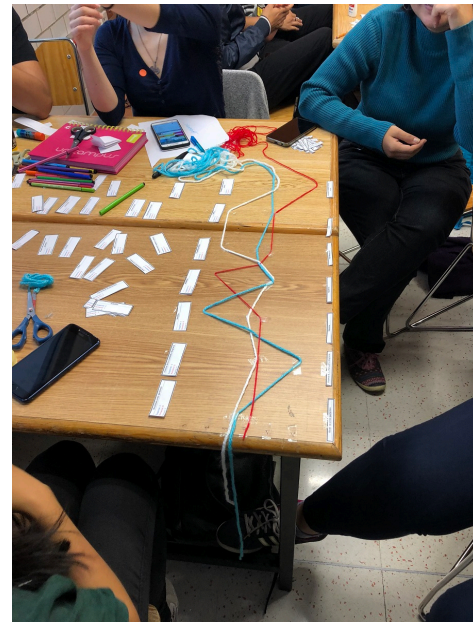Table 2. List of workshops given at the Colloquium.

Figure 1. Students participating in a workshop taught by Carlos León.

Meetings with postgraduate students to discuss their projects and get feedback from the guests also take place.

Additionally, the Colloquium promotes the development of practical skills. In 2002 Mike Sharples offered a workshop on creative writing. In 2013, Nick Montfort organized a workshop about exploratory programming for those in the arts and the humanities. From 2015 onwards, we always have included at least one workshop whose main purpose is to consolidate the knowledge and concepts discussed during the keynotes (see table 2). All they have been very successful. Once we got 60 attendees! No doubt that to put in practice what has been discussed in the lectures has proved to be important experience for our students. However, from my perspective, the opportunity to have a close and informal interaction with top researchers has been more significant (see figure 1).

Most of the invited speakers do not speak Spanish and most of our students do not speak English. We have hired simultaneous translation to deal with this issue. The solution has worked although it is evident that language is an important factor in order to establish a good connection with the audience.

Discussion and Conclusion

Because of the excellence of the researchers that have participated in this annual meeting I am confident to claim that the most innovative and influential research in CC in the last 14 years have been discussed in this Colloquium. Students, and several faculty members, have been introduced by those who are advancing the field into this amazing world. This is priceless because most of our students have never travelled outside the country and their scientific background is very limited. I do not see how they could have had a similar experience in a different context.

Some female students have expressed how the presence of women as keynote speakers have inspired them. I particularly remember this shy student who hardly expressed any emotion. When Clara Fernández Vara's workshop ended, the student's whole face was covered by this huge beautiful smile; she expressed an enormous happiness. Something changed that day. So, it is my belief that the Colloquium has contributed to the personal development of many of those who have attended it. This has been my main motivation during all these years.

As part of the dynamic generated by the Colloquium, in 2011 we organized the International Conference on Computational Creativity. And in 2015 we published in Spanish what I believe is the only book about computational creativity written in a language other than English. The idea came up during the 2014 meeting. The book includes nine chapters, all written by authors that have participated in the Colloquium. All these results have been very satisfactory.

However, there are still many challenges ahead of us. Although many of our students express curiosity and at times look impressed by the products generated by creative agents, it seems that they do not see this area as a field to cultivate. For instance, few undergraduates and postgraduates deliver dissertations in topics related to CC. They prefer to work in more "profitable" areas that they believe will give them better opportunities to get a good job when they finish their studies.

Similarly, with some notable exceptions, it has been really difficult for me to convince my colleagues about the benefits that this field offers for their research interests.

Based on these experiences, I would like to suggest to the CC community the discussion of the following points:

- Besides activities like academic events, a decisive endorsement from the university's authorities is vital to promote the area. Financial support, like the one this Colloquium has received, is essential but not enough. An important step is to incorporate into the curricula classes where CC is discussed. Tutors from diverse backgrounds need to be instructed about the importance of CC in their respective fields; in this way, they might feel more comfortable including such topics in their lectures and seminars.

- The CC community must make an effort to improve its communication with people outside academia. We must learn how to broadly show, for example, the usefulness that developments based on creative systems might have in areas like education, entertainment and the private industry. Likewise, it is necessary to communicate more effectively how research on computational creativity contributes to the understanding of the digital revolution and its effects on society. That is, we must clearly illustrate to general audiences the significance of learning about CC.

- Similarly, the Association for Computational Creativity should take a much more active role to promote the field. Particularly, in those communities outside Europe and the USA. For instance, I suggest that the Association develop and distribute, in different languages, material that instructors from different backgrounds could easily integrate in their classes. I believe that these kind of actions will have a strong positive impact. I would like to go a little further. Given that one of the objectives of the CC community, and of science in general, is the dissemination of knowledge, and because we are creative people, we must promote the development of educational material that is useful to groups with limited technological resources and who do not necessarily speak English. In that way, we will become more inclusive.

I believe that discussing and addressing these points will benefit the whole CC community.

Figure 2. Poster of the 8th edition of the Colloquium.

The near future of the Colloquium is unclear. I have not been able to find someone to take over from the organization. Because of the pandemic, the 15th edition of the Colloquium has been postponed. To make things worse, the current federal government is cutting the financial support for universities, which probably will force my Institution to stop funding academic events like this one. So, probably the Colloquium is facing its last moments.

All in all the organization of the Colloquium has been a wonderful and satisfactory adventure (see figure 2). I hope this paper encourages others to organize similar events. It would be great to share experiences.

One last thought. The generosity of all those researchers that have come to share their knowledge and experience with our students is enormous. I would like to express my eternal gratitude to all them.

Acknowledgements