Pittcon 2020
Technical Program Committee
Final Report

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Summary

Overall, the 2020 technical program was a success. Looking back at the number of disruptions we had, it seems amazing!

- As with every other committee, we had challenges related to the coronavirus outbreak that caused many people to stay away and led to a much higher than usual number of withdrawals. Although we had not previously done this, *we moved many papers up into earlier time slots* to avoid long open breaks.

- The adoption of the **a2z** conference management system led to major problems. Miscommunication and their inexperience with a meeting such as ours led to many problems as detailed later in this report. Our abstracts submitted for oral papers were not searchable in the way we expected, which put as far behind our intended schedule.

- B. Hackley and S. Simpson-Forget have compiled lists of modifications that the **a2z** system needs and, working with the 2021 team, have made progress on some changes. The system will have to evolve over time because we begin using it again each year immediately after Pittcon, but **a2z** needs time to adopt changes that can be inserted into a convenient window for us.

- Our invited speaker gifts did not arrive until Wednesday afternoon.

- We had (for the last time, probably) four and one half days of program, beginning Sunday afternoon and continuing with full days Monday through Thursday.

- The timeline has been expertly formulated and followed by our program administrators over the years. Becky Hackley is the author and curator of the current version. She is the one who makes it happen!

I owe thanks to many office staff and committee members, but most especially to Becky Hackley, Tracy Halahurich and Shelley Simpson-Forget for all their work and problem-solving during the year. Thanks to Jane Chan for this opportunity to be a "re-run" Program Chair after 33 years!

Recommendations

Extract a commitment from every member of the program committee to assist in reviewing abstracts for ALL types of sessions: symposia, organized contributed, workshops AND oral contributed papers and posters. Members should also be willing to help create sessions.

Ask presiders and speakers to _tell everyone to get out on the floor and talk with exhibitors_ if they want to keep benefitting from this meeting. Remind them who ultimately pays the bills! But do it nicely.

Awards – they are great to have but there are too many. They usually overlap with similar invited symposium topics out of necessity, and attendance is mixed. One marquee speaker can spike the apparent data. It may not be possible to change this at this point.

Major modifications are needed to **a2z** software. Those that were most urgent were underway for Pittcon 2021 while this report was in progress, but they are included for the record.

Make an old-fashioned, _complete Final Program available for purchase during pre-registration_. It can be made revenue neutral or better with advertising. Print a relatively small overage. The demand is there! (SS-F gets credit for the pre-reg subscription idea!)

Update the composition of the Program Resource Team based on our most recent focus areas / tracks.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

JAIMA / Pittcon Symposium at JASIS in Japan and at Pittcon

A separate report was issued on this activity. The one major omission was that the Program Chair is supposed to give our accountant information for an invoice to JAIMA to defray the cost of Pittcon's speakers' expenses. Pittcon pays all of them up front for their travel to Japan. I have no idea how the amount is determined, but it was the same in 2017, 18 and 19.

Coulter and Plenary Lectures

The Coulter and Plenary lectures were held on Monday and Tuesday evenings again this year.

Dr. John Rogers of Northwestern University gave the Coulter Lecture to an audience of ~500 people. Judging by the group that gathered to talk with him after the lecture, he has a serious fan club out there in the flexible skin sensor universe.

Dr. Ziva Cooper of UCLA gave the Plenary Lecture. Like all things cannabis, it was also very well attended, probably in the 400 range. She deals more with the potential outcomes of patient use than the chemistry. Again, a large number of attendees stayed to discuss her research after the lecture.

Symposia

I followed the usual practice of meeting with some individuals interested in submitting symposium and other session ideas for 2020 at Pittcon 2019 in Philadelphia

Potential organizers uploaded their submissions into the new data base without too much trouble. We had just a few that came in by email for various reasons.

Review
- Reviewers read proposals on line and scored 1 (no!) to 3 (must have). Reviewers were asked to do as many as they felt comfortable evaluating. The major frustration was the inability to see who the organizer was, what his/her affiliation was and the list of speakers and topics all on one page.
- We used the average of the ratings received to score for discussion. Anything that averaged lower than the high twos had no chance.
- We met face to face to discuss the highest ranked proposals, giving at least a cursory look at almost all of them. This discussion is invaluable for getting an overview of our options and for back and forth dialogue on merits of suggestions. Conference calls aren't the same!
- Anything left as a "maybe" at the meeting was highly unlikely to be accepted.

The number of accepted symposia was decreased from 78 to 71. We disappoint more submitters, but also reduce the number of concurrent symposia, overall speaker expenses and overlapping topics in the same time slot.

Program Resource Team: We held eleven symposia suggested and/or organized by PRT members; attendance was mixed. Three were held on Thursday; the two in the morning had the lowest attendance of the eleven, but the one in the afternoon was very well attended. Content is critical!

I failed to reorganize this group when I had my chance, and didn't give my chair-elect, Geoff White, a heads-up either. A Program Chair's meeting with the PRT takes place when she / he is chair-elect, so any changes need to be made almost two years out, i.e., early fall of 2020 for the 2022 program.

Wednesday afternoon symposia: Wednesday afternoon was "expo only" in 2019 in Philadelphia. We had a significant fall-off in attendance the next day (Thursday), which may or may not have been exacerbated by attendees feeling that after two days to see the expo and four days of program (two of them half days) it was a good time to leave since there was nothing new going on. I requested and received permission from 2020 president Jane Chan to hold just four symposia on Wednesday afternoon. It gave attendees somewhere to be in addition to the expo floor but without the distraction of a full slate of 8 papers. All four symposia were well attended. It is hard to know whether it had any effect on keeping attendees in town. But nearly all Thursday sessions had respectable to good attendance both morning and afternoon. There were no objections from exhibitors that I am aware of. This experiment is moot with the new schedule adopted for 2021.

<u>Extended abstracts</u>: Two page extended summaries were requested from all invited speakers. We set a deadline in December and got very poor response, perhaps 15%. We reopened the site and allowed submission right up to the conference. This improved our compliance to about 50%.

Organized Contributed Sessions and Workshops

These suggestions are submitted and reviewed along with the symposium proposals**.** Workshops were down to only three this year. There were fourteen organized contributed sessions, up a bit from 2019, but in line with historical statistics.

Not every OCS organizer was able to fill their session. One asked to transfer papers he chose from other completed sessions. I said no.

"Oral" sessions (contributed papers and posters)

The table below highlights the awkwardness and inefficiency of the **a2z** system for assembling the program.

	Pre-2020		2020	
1	Assign abstracts by subject to team with leader	Becky	Assign abstracts by subject to team with leader	Becky
2	Review and accept or reject by team agreement	Committee team	Review and accept or reject by team agreement	Committee team
3	Arrange abstracts into sessions, assigning a tentative day and a.m. or p.m., and times for each paper by simply placing in a template.	Team leader	Assign accepted abstracts by tracks for session building	Becky
4	Finalize schedule, adjusting days/times as necessary	Program Chair	Assign abstracts ("child sessions") to "parent sessions". No order could be assigned. All parent sessions were added as 2/29, morning	Team leader
5			Assign a day and time to each Parent session	Program Chair
6			Enter actual day/time slot for **each session manually**	Becky
7			Enter start and end time for **EVERY** "child session" **manually.** Only title was visible.	Becky
8			Create a "recess" child session for every parent session and enter it manually.	Becky

Number: The number of oral presentations was down from 2019 (Philadelphia) but up from 2018 (Orlando). There were fewer posters than in either 2019 or 2018, but not a dramatic drop off. Part of the difference was the large number of withdrawals due to travel restrictions or concerns related to the coronavirus.

Submission issues: There were many issues that arose from using a new e-submission system as well as the data base itself. Examples include a large number of incomplete submissions and many instances of authors giving up and starting over, creating many duplicate submissions. They all had to be tracked down and dealt with, another time-waster. In some cases, the same abstract appeared with two different numbers, but as soon as it was assigned to a session, one disappeared. I never understood what that was all about!

Refer to table above regarding next two sections:

Review of Abstracts Submission: This was the largest malfunction of the 2019-2020 program year. Becky Hackley and Tracy Halahurich matched committee volunteers with topics they indicated they were willing to review, put together teams (where available) with a Leader, and distributed instructions on how to enter and search the database for their topic(s). As noted in the table, in this step, they could only accept or reject the papers, not assign them to sessions. Accepting an abstract makes it accessible in the "Conference" side of the database. In the "Call for Proposals" side, it will no longer appear in the "submitted" section, but can still be found elsewhere in that pathway.

Unfortunately, the fields for Application and Methodology that we had **a2z** add were **not searchable**. The result was that over 400 abstracts where the chosen Application or Methodology had not been used as a track, keyword or term in the abstract (i.e., not repeated) were overlooked. This combined with my inability to access the system and my focus on preparing for and attending JASIS meant the problem was not discovered until October, long after reviews and assignments to sessions should have been complete. I reviewed all of the 438 missed abstracts myself over the next two days, and did most of the assignment to sessions with help from a few great Program Committee members who volunteered to go back to work on this project. This was not ideal, but unfortunately necessary. I still bear the scars.

Session building: See table. The gap between the review process and re-assigning topics for session building caused lost momentum and wasted more precious time. Team leaders entered a date of 2/29/20 and a time of 8:30 AM for every session they created; this was necessary so that we could search for and find all of the sessions in one place. In **a2z** these are known as "Parent Sessions" and are populated with individual papers designated as "Child Sessions".

The "builder" then needed the TITLE of a paper to have this child assigned to its parent. Using a paper number or author would be far more efficient, if those appeared in the appropriate search lists. Which they didn't this year. These folks had to be given a higher level of access to be able to perform this task through the **a2z** data base.

Builders could not put papers in a specific order. The **a2z** system plunked them into a list of eight at random. There are many cases where we prefer to put international authors near breaks because they have a higher incidence of being unable to attend. There was no efficient way to do this for 2020.

Speaker gifts

Plenary and Coulter
I used Wendell August Forge again for the local connection. I switched from tray with six coasters that fit in it like a puzzle to a tray with cut-out handles plus an engraved 9 in x 9 in plaque / trivet with display stand. The plaque was engraved in three areas. Top: Pittcon 2020; middle: Wallace H. Coulter Lecture or Plenary Lecture; bottom: Lecturer name.

Invited Speakers: Magnetic "hour" glasses were not produced and shipped due to internal problems at JLM. Becky Hackley initiated the inquiry that led us to this info. They were promised Tuesday, but arrived in Chicago Wednesday at noon. We gave out as many as we could with one day to go. We sold a few at the store and brought the rest back.

Presiders: Options of bamboo accessory tray, 5-function pen, spiral notebook with 2020 marketing "Perfect Vison" design as cover. Invited Speakers were to be offered these as options also if they didn't want an 11-second hour glass. Instead, trays, pencils and notebooks were their only options!
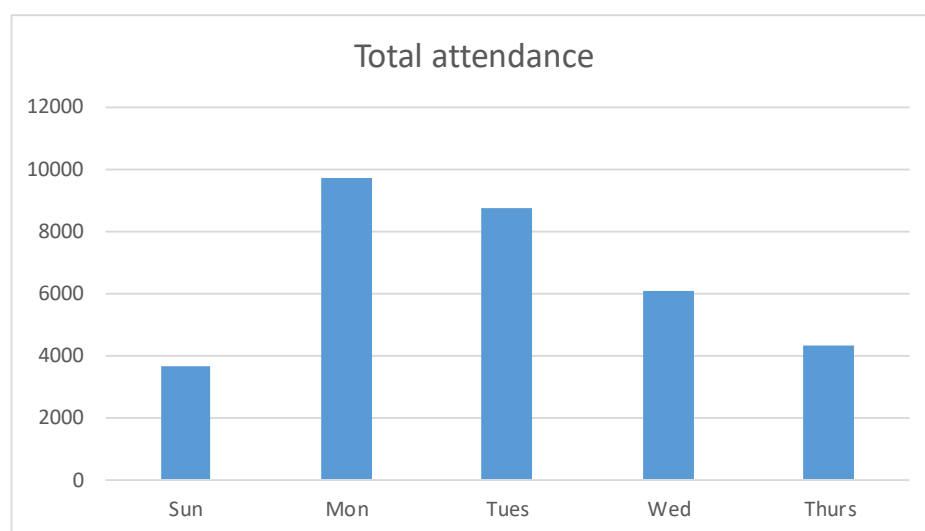
Statistics

Summary statistics from data compiled by Becky Hackley are shown below. Detailed session by session and invited speaker attendee figures are available from Becky.

We tried an experiment this year, having our student aides stay at sessions to count attendees to see how accurate presider counts are. The numbers were in very good agreement for most sessions, so we know we don't need to rely on this with very few possible exceptions.

Pittcon 2020				
Type	# of Sessions	# of Presentations	Attendance	Withdrawals
Coulter	1	1	500	0
Plenary	1	1	400	0
Awards	12	48	2,435	3
Symposia	59	271	9,638	25
Workshops	3	15	525	1
Organized	14	106	4,010	5
Oral	75	464	11,494	73
Sunday posters	2	64	384	17
Posters	33	605	3,259	131
TOTAL	**200**	**1575**	**32645**	**255**

Total Program Attendance by Day

	Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs
Awards, Coulter, Plenary	na	2137	820	378	na
Symposia	926	2567	2602	2257	1286
Oral	2349	3485	2196	1070	2394
Posters	384	na	1557	1037	551
OCS	na	1031	1529	1345	105
Workshops	na	475	60	na	na
Total	3659	9695	8764	6087	4336

The number of sessions is not evenly distributed, e.g., only morning oral sessions on Wednesday, but the data show a good spread of attendance overall.

Invoices

Program has invoices for Food and Beverage on site (only beverages this year), speaker and presider gifts, and approximately 250 invited speakers. All appear as distinct lines in our budget. We send out one invoice, to JAIMA for partial reimbursement of JASIS speaker expenses.

A2Z DATABASE INAUGURAL YEAR ISSUES.

This section highlights the major issues that I confronted with the **a2z** system as Program chair, but does not include an exhaustive list! In many places it is repetitive of prior discussions; the purpose is to have it all in one place.

1 Access

 It took me three separate requests to **a2z** to get the access I needed. Everyone who reviewed papers could access what I could not! This is unlikely to happen again (!) but it caused major delays in getting the program in place as detailed in the "Review" section under Oral abstracts.

2 Organization of Submissions and Search Functions.

There are many levels of search functions. Some work only under the "Call for Proposals" page; others work only under the Conference section. NONE returns the paper number, title, author and affiliation all on one screen. They are all buried under layers that require going in and out of the page over and over again to get complete information for a set of papers. To see associated key words also required a separate search. This is not how we work and needs to be changed.

Printability of lists of papers is another issue. Although all submitted abstracts (oral, poster, Sunday poster, etc.) come up, only one page at a time can be printed. This means printing, selecting the next page, printing, etc. over and over again to get a full list of papers yet to be assigned for reference. Even so, some columns of information (right hand end of page) cannot be included on the print-out. It is tedious, and prints a lot of unnecessary heard and footer info over and over.

3 Data from searches

Searches by various key words or tracks hardly ever turned up the same number of results twice. Papers disappeared and reappeared on the lists produced with no apparent rhyme or reason. This was VERY frustrating as I tried to make sure every paper was accounted for. Becky, Tracy and I had to keep in close touch as to who was doing what, but only a fraction of the abstract mysteries were resolved this way. This was never explained from my perspective.

Once a paper was assigned to a parent session, it had more limited "searchability". To find out where it was, you had to go back to "Call for Proposals", search for it, and click on the session number associated with it to see where it had been assigned.

4 Tracks

We asked to have our traditional "tracks", divided into application and methodology, added to the **a2z** user interface. What we didn't know was that <u>what **a2z** added was not searchable</u>. Each author chose one of our traditional categories first. But unless they chose the same one again as a track and / or key word, it would never come up in a search

When we sent out abstracts for review, we used our traditional Applications and Methods to create lists for the teams. The result was that we missed nearly half of the abstracts; those without a duplicate choice were not sent out. Discovering these "missing" abstracts was actually an accident, and by the time we did, we were way behind schedule. We played catch-up for at least a month afterward.

What we intended only as key words were all available as tracks.
- We ended up with over 200 categories (the tracks) of abstracts to try to fit into sessions.
- All of the same descriptors were available as key words.
- Already dealt with for 2021.

5 Building sessions

As described above, each half-day segment was called a "parent session". Each talk within the half-day was called a "child session". Double use of the term "session" led to many, many instances of confusion. Changing the designation of the individual papers / posters would be helpful.

Being unable to put the "child session" papers in a specific order is unacceptable and must be changed.

Having the data base segmented by "Call" and "Conference" with frequent need to go back and forth – up a couple levels, over one, down a couple levels - is a huge time toilet. The database is SLOW, which makes it even more frustrating.

Lists of sessions always included a large number of individual papers as if they were "parent" sessions. This problem persisted into putting the tech program on the web site. I don't know where it came from or how to address it.

To making each year better than the last!
JHS
April, 2020