

**Web Science is Growing Up:  
interdisciplinary insights and a maturing community at WebSci '11**

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ACM Web Science 2011, which ran from 14 – 17 June in Koblenz, Germany, is one of the more interdisciplinary ACM conferences: unlike ACM WWW, which focuses on infrastructure, standards and development, Web Science concerns the Web as an unfolding process. It examines the Web and our society, including politics, economics and law.

Why is Web Science important? The Web is so much more than the sum of its parts. Web Science helps us understand the complex multiplicity of socio-technical interactions – both micro and macro – enabled by the Web and the millions who contribute to that Web. We need that understanding to make informed decisions, whether we're discussing standards and infrastructures or government policy – or, as Professor Barry Wellman observed in his keynote 'Networked Individualism', trying to understand the ways in which online social networks fail to support the richness and dynamism of human relations.

This year's conference was a stellar event. One highlight was the diverse, top-quality poster session, with 85 posters on topics from trust and privacy to healthcare; education to network analysis; and user experiences to music folksonomies. Other highlights could be found in the paper sessions: these included the sound contributions nominated for best paper (which went to two papers, on user churn in social networks, and online clandestine organisations); Alan Dix's philosophical questioning of the nature of knowledge and truth; and Mark Bernstein's poetic delivery of his analysis of the fragility of the Web's long tail.

There was genuinely interdisciplinary work present at WebSci'11, and it was this work that really shone. Generally, such work was coauthored by people from different 'home' disciplines, and it was notable that Web Science students with supervisors from different disciplines stood out. There's a key lesson here: it's essential to get to grips with multiple disciplines, both for research and for teaching.

The curriculum workshop bore witness to the maturing of the WebSci community, with nearly 40 attendees from 17 institutions, 14 of which are running or planning to run a Web Science program. Defining the curriculum of a nascent discipline is no small task, but there exists some fine work here, not only towards building and honing such a curriculum, but also explaining that process: White et al's work on this ('Negotiating the Web Science Curriculum through Shared Educational Artefacts') was a best paper nominee.

More than anything, I came away with an impression that this is a maturing community. I've had the privilege of attending all three Web Science conferences, and it's been a pleasure to see the community growing up — from the 2009 event in Athens where no one quite knew what to expect, through being collocated with the Web conference in Raleigh, to this year as an ACM- and ICA-affiliated event. WebSci'11 felt balanced, and had a little gravitas that the previous two did not. It was an inspiring event for a vibrant, growing community: here's to WebSci'12.