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Computer science and engineering participates in 2016 ACM Tapia conference



Each year, the Department of Computer Science and Engineering at Texas A&M University participates in the ACM Richard Tapia Celebration of Diversity in Computing Conference. This year, the three-day conference was held in Austin, Texas, from Sept. 14-16.

The Tapia 2016 conference theme, "Diversity Matters!" was chosen for three key reasons: diversity matters for innovation, diversity matters for knowledge and diversity matters for life.

The conference is designed to bring together the strengths and differences that pave the way for growth and innovation in the field of computing. This conference not only recognizes, but also celebrates these differences by gathering students, researchers and professionals from various backgrounds in one place.

Twenty-six students from the department and the college attended the conference, four of whom presented during the student poster session. Computer science and engineering Ph.D. student, Vijay Rajanna, won first prize for his graduate student poster.

Seth Polsley, vice president of social for the computer science and engineering graduate student association (CSEGSA), attended the conference for the first time.

“What was most impactful to me was the student poster session,” Polsley said. “The session was focused on accessibility in computing, and it featured presenters from very diverse backgrounds. As I interacted with one of the presenters through his interpreter, it dawned on me that I had never experienced a research poster presentation from a member of the deaf community before. How much amazing research are we missing out on because there aren't enough venues for people of all types of backgrounds to present their work? That's the question I came away with from the Tapia Conference. It's an important question in my opinion, and efforts like the Tapia Conference are necessary because that is where these questions are being addressed.”

Dr. Dilma Da Silva, computer science and engineering department head, professor and holder of the Ford Motor Company Design Professorship II, served as general chair for this year's conference. In this role, she was responsible for overseeing the conference organization.

“The conference offered a program that highlights the importance of technical excellence while also offering opportunities for career development,” Da Silva said. “This year the career fair was amazing, with both students and industry representatives very pleased for the opportunities to interact.”

Tapia is organized by the Coalition to Diversify Computing, sponsored by the Association for Computing Machinery, and presented by the Center for Minorities and People with Disabilities in Information Technology (CMD-IT). CMD-IT's executive director is Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Royce E. Wisenbaker Professor, Dr. Valerie Taylor. The conference is also put together by the Computing Research Association and the IEEE Computer Society.

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By: **[Rachel Rose \(mailto:rdaggie@tamu.edu\)](mailto:rdaggie@tamu.edu)**