

# The 1994 Florida AI Research Symposium

Robert R. Hoffman

■ The 1994 Florida AI Research Symposium was held 5–7 May at Pensacola Beach, Florida. This symposium brought together researchers and practitioners in AI, cognitive science, and allied disciplines to discuss timely topics, cutting-edge research, and system development efforts in areas spanning the entire AI field. Symposium highlights included Pat Hayes's comparison of the history of AI to the history of powered flight and Clark Glymour's discussion of the prehistory of AI.

The 1994 Florida AI Research Symposium (FLAIRS-94) was held 5–7 May at Pensacola Beach, Florida. This symposium (held annually since 1987) brings together a diverse group of researchers and practitioners in AI, cognitive science, and allied disciplines to discuss timely topics, cutting-edge research, and system development efforts in areas spanning the entire AI field. FLAIRS-94 was hosted by the Florida AI Research Society, the University of West Florida, and Florida State University.

Pat Hayes (University of Illinois) gave a dinner talk in which he compared the history of AI to the history of powered flight. The parallels, it turns out, are striking, and the allegory suggests that the very concept of intelligence can be expanded well beyond the usual reference to human-organic intelligence. (By analogy, airplanes do not have to have feathers or beaks, but some early flying machines included such features.)

Other symposium highlights included Clark Glymour's (Carnegie Mellon University) discussion of the prehistory of AI, which stimulated hearty debates about prominent figures. Ken Forbus (Northwestern University) discussed research in cognitive science and some related AI simulation efforts, showing clearly how advances in AI might hinge on the continued cross-fertilization of AI

and cognitive science. Ron Yaeger (Iona College) laid out the variety of ways in which fuzzy sets are and will be important in AI. Finally, Marvin Minsky (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) gave a rousing presentation of his society of minds theory, with a focus on the role of emotion in reasoning.

Included among the meeting's prominent themes was the notion of AI as an embedded, enabling technology. For example, a panel presented the latest applications of AI within the aerospace industry. Particularly interesting was a plenary panel comprised of university presidents, corporate chief executive officers, and high-ranking government officials, who discussed ways in which AI could be seen as an enabling technology with respect to society's broader goals.

FLAIRS-94 was notable for the mix of industry, government, and academic participants. In fact, pound for pound, academics at the meeting did not much outweigh the practitioners, who represented (among others) Boeing; IBM; Neuron Data, Inc.; I-Net, Inc.; Lockheed; National Aeronautics and Space Administration; European Institute of Cognitive Sciences and Engineering; Dassault-Aviation (France); Metalingual Systems, Inc.; and Apple Computer, Inc.

The bulk of the meeting consisted of a number of tracks: machine learning, natural language processing, reasoning and computational logic, knowledge-based systems, and expertise. In addition, there were a number of topical sessions: artificial life, AI in education and training, reflexive reasoning, genetic algorithms, and temporal reasoning. Two topical workshops were held in conjunction with FLAIRS-94; one was on analogical reasoning and the other on temporal reasoning. The workshops appeared successful and were

certainly well attended.

It should be noted that participants were not just from Florida and the southern United States–Gulf States region, although Florida, in particular, has a lot going for it in terms of AI. The atmosphere was definitely international—270 participants from around the world. It is unfortunate that space does not permit me the luxury of giving a blurb on every single paper; there were 121 presentations.<sup>1</sup>

It is frustrating that no brain, let alone my enfeebled one, is able to read the future and cull from this meeting a list of those key ideas and clever innovations that will revolutionize life as we know it. As is always the case for conferences, all the participants were frustrated by the desire to attend everything all at once—a reflection of the fact that everything interested everyone. There was the inevitable lack of sufficient time to get the real work accomplished in meeting casually, drawing graphs on napkins, sampling the local color, and so on. However, without these frustrations, we would, of course, know that there was no need for such meetings. As it was, everyone came away with a stack of business cards and some things to do right away.

Finally, there were a lot of really smart people at this meeting, and what I want to know is how many of them figured out, on the first try, how to use the shower control knobs.

FLAIRS-95 will be held in Melbourne Beach, Florida, on 26–29 April 1995.

## Notes

1. The proceedings are available from FLAIRS, c/o John Stewman, Eckerd College, Computer Science, P.O. Box 12560, St. Petersburg, FL 33733-2560 (\$35.00). In addition, selected papers from FLAIRS-94 will appear in journal special issues. Papers from the track on expertise are being put together for a special issue of *The Journal of Experimental and Theoretical Artificial Intelligence*, as are papers from the workshop on analogical reasoning. Likewise, a special issue of *Computational Intelligence* will be devoted to papers from the workshop on temporal reasoning.

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