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This blog hosts weekly news about the Texas A&M University Sketch Recognition Lab. SRL is directed by Dr. Tracy Hammond, an associate professor in the Computer Science and Engineering Department. More information about the lab can be found at <http://srl.tamu.edu>

Thursday, March 12, 2015

## Vijay Rajanna's Reflections of the 2015 Tapia Conference

The 2015 Richard Tapia Celebration of Diversity in Computing Conference was held over February 18 – 21 in snowy Boston, MA. Several students from the Sketch Recognition Lab, directed by Dr. Tracy Hammond, attended.

"It was very cold in Boston," Vijay Rajanna, a second year doctoral student who attended the conference, laughed. "I had never seen snow in my life – well, I've seen snow, it 'snowed' once in College Station, but it was only for a few hours and did not stick. I really wanted to see what it was like when there were three or four inches of snow. It was really amazing. Even though it was extremely cold, I really liked it."



(The view of Boston, MA - courtesy of Vijay Rajanna)

The conference is named after Dr. Richard Tapia, a mathematician and professor in the Department of Computational and Applied Mathematics at Rice University in Houston. He is a nationally acknowledged leader in diversity and has given many addresses at national and international conferences.

The goal of the Tapia Conferences is to bring together the community of people involved in computing to celebrate diversity and connect with one another. The conference also serves as a way for participants to network and be inspired by presentations and conversations held there.

"Tapia is always a fun," Rajanna nodded as he spoke about a networking experience he had. "I got connected to a computer interface and research woman from Google – Nancy – and she cared enough to look at my resume and give feedback on what was good and what needed work. We talked about my research and she gave feedback on that, too."

He went on to reflect and discuss how Tapia also allows for networking with people apart from experts.

"You get to bond with the students there because most of them are graduate students or working on their doctorate. So, they share their research and give you feedback on yours. There is a lot of opportunities in collaborative work."

The theme of the 2015 conference was "Diversity at Scale."

As quoted from the Tapia website, this theme is in celebration of the "efforts to move diversity in all aspects of computing beyond conversation and study into full practice and implementation."

### Contributors

- Stephanie Valentine
- Tracy Hammond
- Hannah Conrad
- David Turner
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It is important foundation of the conference to celebrate the push to diversify the field of computing and value the differing backgrounds, beliefs, and opinions that make up the larger community at whole.

Rajanna agreed that there was importance in the connection between different areas of study and diverse opinions in regard to the computing industry and Human-Computer Interaction (HCI).

"HCI is quite wide. Computers can be anything - the sensors in phones or watches," he explained, gesturing to his own cell phone's screen. "If you are developing anything around that, it can be called HCI, and that can be applicable to different domains, like fashion, transport, or food processing. It all becomes HCI applications."

While Rajanna did not present at the conference this year, he enjoyed many presentations and speeches.

He enthusiastically described two in detail and gestures.

The first was a talk given by Dr. Shaun Kane titled 'Superhuman Computing: Designing Custom Software and Hardware Interfaces to Support Our Natural Abilities.' In his presentation, Dr. Kane covered his lab's recent efforts in creating more accessible technologies and aids for disabled people, ranging from vision impairment to physical disabilities.

"They do an incredible job on incredible projects," Rajanna concluded the first description. "It's excellent. I really liked it."

The second presentation discussed was by Dr. Dilma Da Silva, the Department Head of Computer Science and Engineering at Texas A&M University. Titled 'Challenges in Mobile Cloud Computing,' the presentation covered a lot of information. It included discussion about technical and business aspects of Cloud that allowed it to become as revolutionary as it is today, issues the system faces, and how advancing and changing mobile devices may cause new challenges to arise for the system.

As a family, the SRL members made sure to keep in contact and spend time with one another while at the convention. It only seemed fitting that the main way that the group kept in contact with one another when apart was through technology.



(Members of the Sketch Recognition Lab gathered for a group picture)

"We have Google Hangouts. We chatted on that all the time," Rajanna explained. "So we decided on the presentations that we wanted to attend like that. Most of us attended most of the presentations together."

While in Boston and on an off-day for the Tapia Conference, Rajanna explored MIT and Dr. Hammond's old lab out of curiosity about the labs and where the director of the Sketch Recognition Lab once worked.

"I really wanted to visit MIT and two labs, there. One is MIT Media – a prestigious, world known lab – and MIT Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Lab (MIT SCAIL)," he commented. "These are world famous labs. It was really cool."

Looking forward to the future of his studies and his work, there are many lessons and aids that Rajanna has taken away from the Tapia Conferences.

"If you are attending Tapia Conferences, there are two tracks you can concentrate on," he began. "One is where you meet all the experts and all the students that have a similar interest as you and network with them and collaborate with them. The other track is, basically, networking with the companies and research labs. So you already are in contact with all these researchers and experts. This makes it really easy to approach them once you graduate and are looking for jobs."

He has also obtained a feeling of positive competition from the conference.

"If you look at other students' posters, you can see what they've done and where they are and where you are."

You can evaluate yourself," he concluded. "It triggers a sense of competitiveness in you. If you don't do it by next year, someone else will do it. And that's important and has really impacted me."

Dr. Hammond's thoughts on the conference? "Tapia is one of my favorite conferences. It is a great networking conference, but more than that, I have seen multiple people come back transformed from their experiences there, filled with increased self confidence, efficacy, and inspirational advice for others. I always encourage all of my students to attend."

Why didn't she attend this year? "I am really saddened that I couldn't make it this year. It is perhaps my favorite conference to attend. The sense of community is amazing."

What did she miss most? "Last year I spent hours in the lobby playing piano and singing with Armando Fox, David Patterson and Celine Latulipe. The reunion will have to wait for next year."

Posted by [Hannah Conrad](#) at 8:39 PM



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