



Student Chapter of the System Dynamics Society

Snowball No 6, December 2007 Newsletter of the Student Chapter

Dear Members of the Student Chapter of the System Dynamics Society,

The Student Chapter Council would firstly like to say thank you to all those who gave their feedback on the PhD Colloquium (see point 3). We are now getting ready for the next colloquium (see point 1) and this Snowball has some helpful tips on how best to prepare a paper for the event (see point 2).

It is through our work that this Chapter remains healthy, growing and useful for its members. We have added a section on recently graduated PhD students (see point 5) but need your help in continuing this. We also feel that there should be celebration not just work completed but also work currently being carried out by our members. Of course, the perfect place to express your work is the PhD Colloquium. We hope to receive your paper submissions in the New Year.

The Chapter is also looking at how best to serve its members and has introduced two fixed email addresses, which will enable members to contact the chapter even as the council members change (see point 4).

Hope to hear from you all soon,

The Policy Council of the Student Chapter

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1. Conference of the System Dynamics Society, Athens, 2008

The 26th International Conference of the System Dynamics Society, July 20-24th 2008, in Athens is on its way. And so is the PhD Colloquium!

You can submit your papers until April 22, 2008. The paper length ranges from an extended abstract (5 pages) to preferably a full paper (maximum 20 pages). Further details about the submission are also available at our website <http://www.systemdynamics.org/chapters/student/colloq.htm>.

2. How to Prepare for the SD Conference

Are you planning to submit a paper to the next System Dynamics Conference or the PhD Colloquium? Deadlines are approaching and it is time for you to get started! The Student Chapter would like to help you by giving you some advices on how to prepare for such event.

The following list of recommendations is inspired from the opening speech given by Professor John Sterman (MIT) at last years PhD Colloquium, in Boston. Professor Sterman gave the student-audience advice on what to do and what to avoid when preparing for a conference. To complete the list, suggestions which were discussed on the SD Mailing List on the topic "Ensuring Quality of Models" were also added. We hope the following tips help you achieving insightful academic work!

When preparing a conference paper, keep in mind to:

- Have a clear dynamic hypothesis, i.e. a clear feedback theory
- Study a problem of great interest to your audience and to you
- Obtain a model which reproduces what the real world does
- Become an expert in that particular system you are studying
- Understand the core mechanisms regulating your model, i.e. a good model does not imply a large number of variables.
- Come up with non-trivial implications for theory and practice
- Understate your results and do not generalize too much
- Validate your model and show validation-results so that your audience gains higher confidence in your model's outputs and predictions.
- Be aware of delays: the entire process of investigating, writing and editing a paper takes time and energy

- Develop a deep knowledge of your audience
- Develop your writing and public speaking skills
- Practice, Practice, Practice
- HAVE FUN!

Do not hesitate in using the Student Chapter Discussion board, on facebook.com, or our Mailing List to ask other members for advices, references, papers and comments. We are looking forward seeing you in Athens!

3. Feedback from 2007's SD Conference Participants

Here are some examples from students who attended and presented their research at the PhD Colloquium last year.

Last year, I had the opportunity to participate in the PhD Colloquium, and it was a very nice and insightful experience. While as a PhD student one rather gets academic feedback, the colloquium allowed for both. My presentation was about organizational change, and the practitioners had a lot to say about the practical relevance of the topic. This gave me motivation to pursue my interest further. At the same time others also pointed out flaws in my way of approaching the topic, which was helpful indeed. The whole event took place in a very cooperative and helpful atmosphere and the audience's comments were very useful.

Nici - University of Mannheim, Germany

I guess my main comment is about how to get feedback during the breakout sessions after the presentations. I think we can improve that a little bit at least for some presenters. My observation is that the current approach is to open the breakout session up to questions from the audience. The questions usually include clarification questions and questions/comments that challenge the presenter. I think there's another way that some presenters might find useful. This second method would include specific questions from the presenter in terms of literature review, research framing, model formulation, data collection, model validation, and so on. This method would actually contribute to the PhD process of the presenter. There might be two ways of managing that. In the first one the presenter might follow a structured approach during the breakout session and ask questions to the audience one by one (what are the relevant papers I haven't cited, how can I collect data for this work etc.). The second way would be to have breakout groups within the breakout session. In that case each group would discuss one question such as relevant literature or ideas for data collection etc. for say 15 minutes and then convey the ideas back to the presenter.

Of course each presenter has different needs and expectations so which method to choose depends on the presenter. I thought these ideas might be useful for some presenters.

Gokhan - Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)

Participating at the PhD-Colloquium proved great for several reasons. First, the paper I submitted was commented by an anonymous reviewer who provided valuable, detailed feedback as well as general encouragement. Second, preparing for as well as actually delivering the presentation provided a great opportunity to talk about my PhD-Project in a structured yet welcoming setting. The following discussion made me aware of a number of research streams and fields that I presently had not yet considered. All in all, the Colloquium is a great opportunity and I would like to encourage fellow students to present their work in early stages of the process.

Matthias – University of Bern, Switzerland

I enjoyed presenting at the System Dynamics PhD Colloquium in Nijmegen (2006) very much. It was a unique opportunity to present my work-in-progress and to obtain valuable feedback from well-acknowledged scholars. Sure, at the own university there are also PhD colloquia which are useful as well. However, this is a different kind of usefulness - the most interesting part of the SD PhD Colloquium is the divergent perspectives of the participants; they are management scientists, economists, social scientists, perhaps even natural scientists and scholars from the humanities. But all have one thing in common: an interest or an education in System Dynamics. The discussions, during both the presentation and the whole colloquium day, are highly encouraging. To my fellow students, I want to say the following: you have to present your work at the SD-PhD colloquium. However, make sure that your project is in a discussable stage; otherwise you will obtain feedback that is only general in nature. We are looking for feedback that is important. To express it with - a slightly adapted - citation of Gregory Bateson: "what we mean by feedback [original: information] ... is a difference which makes a difference".

Best Personal Regards, Stefan Groesser

The Student Chapter kindly thanks 2007 PhD Colloquium's participants for their positive feedback on their experience as presenters. We hope that their testimonies shall encourage students and young researchers to come, participate, and share their work and interests at the next colloquium in Athens!

4. Contacting the Student Chapter

To further our objective of trying to make the Chapter more easily accessible, we have two new email addresses!

For general questions, comments or contact please use:
student@chapters.systemdynamics.org

For the PhD Colloquium questions, comments or submissions please use:
phdcolloquium@systemdynamics.org

5. Recently Graduated Chapter Members: CONGRATULATIONS!!!

This is a knowledge stock to help celebrate PhD successes in SD. If you or anybody you know has recently completed a PhD in SD email us, using one of the addresses above, and we will include them in our next snowball. For now let's say congratulations to:

- Allyson Beall with the topic "Participatory Environmental Modeling and System Dynamics: Integrating Natural Resource Science and Social Concerns".

6. Illustrating System Dynamics!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7SMu5hX64Aw>

Check it out! This little cartoon realized by the Brazilian WWF is a very nice, funny, and insightful illustration of the main concepts of System Dynamics: feedback and delays.

7. Best Wishes for 2008

The Student Chapter would like to end this edition of Snowball by wishing all its members and readers



Merry Christmas to all of you!

and... **A HAPPY
NEW YEAR**

The Policy Council of the Student Chapter