STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE

JORDAN BOYD-GRABER

1. Director of the Computational Linguistics Lab

At the University of Maryland, I served as the director of the Computational Linguistics and Information Processing (CLIP) Lab 2018–2022 (with a pause in the middle while I was on sabbatical in Zürich). This required advocating for resources for the lab: money to host visitors, space to seat students, and time from technical staff to support our computational resources. More importantly, it is also the director's responsibility to bring the ten tenure-track faculty together for building consensus and shared decision making on matters ranging from printer placement to student discipline.

During this time, we had to substantially rebuild our computational infrastructure. When I took over as director, the lab was primarily using CPU nodes with data stored on ZFS on its own monolithic cluster. As I'm wrapping up my term, we have moved to a cluster that's shared with other research groups with high-memory GPUs backed by a modern distributed filesystem. Making this transition required lobbying for funding, working with the technical staff to implement the changes, coordinating equipment purchases on individual grants, and then instructing students on how to use the equipment as we navigate these transitions.

Apart from these computational changes, we also navigated the pandemic's transitions from fully online to hybrid interactions: exhorting students to follow the university's guidance—on everything from social distancing and mask wearing—and supporting students and faculty working from home to still participate in lab life.

2. Professional Service

As an assistant professor I did the typical service roles: faculty advisor for the 2015 ACL student research workshop, serving as area chair for EMNLP, ACL, NEURIPS, ICML, and NAACL.

In 2022, after complaining about how hybrid conferences created a "separate but equal" status for virtual attendees, I was invited to be EMNLP's first virtual poster chair. Our goal was use technology and prioritizing cross-modal interaction to make sure that those unable to be in Abu Dhabi—either because of visa status, health, or family obligations—are still able to interact and be visible.

After accepting this position, I was asked to serve as a program chair for the 2023 meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics, the top venue for natural language processing research. Our goal is to further bridge the divide between the online and in-person participants: improving the online experience, focusing on interactions, and lowering the costs for online participants.

3. Creating a New Undergraduate Curriculum

From 2011–2013, I chaired UMD's Information Science undergraduate education committee. During this time, we developed a new undergraduate degree program to complement the university's existing strengths (and exploding enrollments) in computer science. I developed the initial proposal, articulation agreements with local community colleges, planned course offerings, and shepherded the proposal through college, provost, and State of Maryland Higher Education Commission review.

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Susan Winter and Vedat Diker (along with many others) took over the actual implementation of the program, which became the university's fastest growing major (958 majors in less than five years of existence).

While I'm sure those later steps were more difficult, my first steps were not easy either. I had to convince elements within the college that an undergraduate program was indeed a good idea and would not distract or detract from the College's existing (graduate-only) programs that were already stable, successful (both academically and financially), and well understood. I crafted a data-driven message (using a topic model analysis) that convinced faculty hold-outs and the administration that a new undergraduate program that would be well-received by potential students and employers.

We then created a set of concentrations, courses, and schedules to offer the courses for initial cohorts. We drafted course descriptions, learning outcomes, and worked with feeder programs to define prerequisites.

4. Building the Faculty

Apart from the undergraduate program, the largest investment of my time in university service is in recruiting new faculty. At Colorado, I served on the search committee that hired Jed Brown, Raf Frongillo, and Matt Hammer and lead the recruitment of Raf Frongillo. The following year, Martha Palmer and I successfully recruited Chenhao Tan.

At Maryland, I served two years on a search committee for a joint hire between the iSchool and Journalism (the first year failed) that hired Naeemul Hassan. Within computer science, I was a part of the search committee that hired Rachel Rudinger, and I led her recruitment.

Because of my joint appointment across four units at Maryland, I have served as mentor for multiple faculty: Yla Tausczik, Rachel Rudinger, Babak Fotouhi, and Naeemul Hassan.

5. Outreach to Undergraduates and High Schools

My research is—in part—about human vs. computer question answering competitions, so it's only natural that I also support our undergraduate students who compete against other schools in academic competitions by answering questions.

At the University of Colorado, this required building an organization from the group up: the University of Colorado had previously not competed in these events. I organized three local high school tournaments to raise funds for so that students could have the funds to travel to national competitions, which they did for the first time in 2016 (after winning their region). The accomplishment from my time at Colorado that I'm most proud of is building this group of passionate undergraduates who developed both competition-specific skills and more general leadership skills.

At Maryland, I advise an existing academic team that consistently is in the top ten nationally. I help advise the club leadership, provide institutional memory, and connect the club with external organizations (e.g., setting up cross-university scrimmages between UMD and Howard).

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