



38th ACM SIGACT-SIGPLAN Symposium on
Principles of Programming Languages

POPL 2011 General Chair Report

[Thomas Ball](#), Microsoft Research
tball@microsoft.com

Overview

[POPL 2011](#) was held in Austin, Texas from January 26-28 at the Omni Austin Hotel Downtown. POPL 2011 had a **record 49 accepted papers** (see the program chair's report for more information) and a **record 324 registrants**. We received a **record 48 requests for student travel**, of which 35 were approved. The negotiated rate for the hotel was \$169/night (not a record, thankfully) and we more than filled the hotel block (thanks, everyone). POPL registration included proceedings on a USB stick (hardcopy could be ordered for an extra \$20). 71 people purchased the hardcopy version of the proceedings. 32 people took advantage of the option to become a member of SIGPLAN when they registered for POPL.

Many people have asked: what led to the record registration? I believe there are a number of factors: increased number of papers means increased number of authors attending (91 POPL authors attended); high attendance from Texas institutions (46), primarily UT Austin; NSF grants to fund travel of students without papers and SIGPLAN PAC funds for students with papers (we had 113 students attend; 35 of these students received travel support either from the NSF grant or SIGPLAN PAC). The table above shows participation in POPL by country.

USA	184
United Kingdom	32
France	22
Germany	22
Japan	13
South Korea	7
Denmark	5
Sweden	5
Switzerland	5
Australia	3
Austria	3
India	3
Israel	3

Belgium	2
Canada	2
Portugal	2
Singapore	2
Spain	2
China	1
Finland	1
Greece	1
Italy	1
Netherlands	1
Norway	1
Turkey	1

Supporters donated over \$30,000 to help reduce the cost of registration (to pre-2009 levels) and keep student registration very affordable, fund videotaping of all invited talks (to appear in the ACM Digital Library) and technical sessions. Supporters were Google, IBM Research, Intel, Microsoft Research, Mozilla, NEC, and the Computer Science Department at the University of Texas at Austin. Microsoft Research funded a game room with three Xbox/Kinects, which were raffled off at the end of the final

plenary session, along with remaining hardcopy proceedings. Additionally, Evan Chang applied for a \$12,000 grant from the National Science Foundation to support student travel, which we received and used.

POPL 2011 was a “cozy” affair, for which I accept full responsibility. I chose the Omni hotel for a number of reasons, but it was clear in the end that the Omni ballroom was too small for a POPL with 324 attendees. If POPL had maxed out at 280-300 registrants, it would have been fine. But the record number of registrants meant we were running at full capacity (we used theater seating in the ballroom and managed to squeeze 330 chairs in, even with the videotaping crews taking up substantial space). Furthermore, since Ballrooms A and B were of equal size, if one of the parallel sessions was more popular, we had some standing room only. In retrospect, I should have waited to confirm a hotel until after we decided (at POPL in Madrid in January 2010) to accept more papers (but even then, it wasn’t clear that we would accept more papers, have such a great turnout from Texas, or so many students requesting travel grants).



The Technical Program

POPL consisted of three plenary sessions with invited talks, 16 technical sessions of three papers each, and a final plenary session to present the 49th paper. The 16 technical sessions were held in parallel, two sessions at a time, covering eight 1.5 hour time slots (each presenter was given 25 minutes to present and 5 minutes for questions). This allowed us to finish in just under three full days.

The first two invited talks were by Xavier Leroy of INRIA (“Verified squared: does critical software deserve verified tools?”) and Matthew MacLaurin of Microsoft (“The Design of Kodu: A Tiny Visual Programming Language for Children on the Xbox”). The third plenary session featured a remembrance of Robin Milner, who passed away in 2010. Andrew Gordon and Peter Sewell organized the event (“Robin Milner: verification, languages, and concurrency”), which featured talks by Robert Harper (CMU), Alan Jeffrey (Alcatel-Lucent Bell Labs), and John Harrison (Intel). Thanks to all our invited speakers and talk organizers!

At the last minute, we decided to offer attending students a chance to make short presentations of their work on Thursday evening. Byron Cook organized the event, which ended up running two and half hours and offering sixteen students the chance to give presentations. Thanks to Byron for his work in making this event a success.

More Thanks



Many thanks are due to our excellent staff, volunteer and paid. I want to thank, first and foremost, **Mooly Sagiv** (photo to left) and his program committee (PC) for putting together an excellent technical program. As Mooly said to me, “You only get to run POPL once”. He took his job very seriously and demanded much of himself and his PC; the results are quite spectacular in terms of both the program and the quality of reviews that authors of both accepted and rejected papers received. The second hardest working POPL volunteer was Matthew Might, who was the POPL 2011 Workshop Chair. He had a tremendous number of events to manage and did so spectacularly. Kudos to Swarat Chaudhuri for maintaining the POPL web site and to Evan Chang for his advice on the POPL budget and acquisition of the NSF student travel grant. Thanks to our student volunteers from the UT Austin, especially Benjamin Delaware who showed up early many mornings to help with registration.

Thanks to Carole Manne and the staff at Registration Systems Lab for their expert job on running registration, and also to John and Joanne Lautelere of Integrated Management Solutions for everything they did to make sure the hotel services and POPL needs matched up.

POPL was fortunate to have Ronan Nugent from Springer-Verlag and Ada Brunstein from MIT Press on site to present the latest books available from their respective publishing houses.

I also would like to thank the “Principles of Jazz” who performed after rehearsing just once together (but put in many hours at home preparing for the gig): Andrew Appel (saxophone), Mike Hicks (drums), Rustan Leino (drums, keyboard, and saxophone), Todd Millstein (guitar), Gordon Stewart (saxophone), and Philippe Suter (keyboard). I played electric bass and coordinated the effort.

The POPL 2011 logo was designed by Jan Christiansen and Christian-Albrechts.



Sponsored and Co-located Events

POPL had 8 sponsored workshops and tutorials and 2 co-located events. Ongoing sponsored events included:

- Workshop: Declarative Aspect of Multi-core Programming ([DAMP](#): attendance 31);
- Workshop: Types in Language Design and Implementation ([TLDI](#): attendance 57);
- Workshop: Programming Languages meets Program Verification ([PLPV](#): attendance 57);

- Workshop: Partial Evaluation and Program Manipulation ([PEPM](#): attendance 33).

Sponsored events appearing for the first time at POPL included:

- Tutorial: Using Nominal Isabelle for PL Research ([Nominal](#): attendance 20)
- Tutorial: Theorem Proving Tools for Program Analysis ([TPTPA](#): attendance 41)
- Workshop: Script to Program Evolution ([STOP](#): attendance 27);
- Workshop: Verification of Concurrent Data Structures ([VERICO](#): attendance 36)

Co-located events included:

- Conference: Verification, Model Checking, and Abstract Interpretation ([VMCAI](#): attendance 70)
- Symposium: Practical Aspects of Declarative Languages ([PADL](#): attendance 39)

Survey Results

A survey was distributed to all attendees on the final day. We received 156 responses, just under 50% of all attendees. The survey had 31 questions with a multiple-choice format and a chance for people to give written comments. Question 10 was included by mistake and was crossed out. Here are the results of the multiple choice (you'll find all the written comments later in the document).

Of particular interest to me were the responses to questions 6 (# of papers), 7 (parallel sessions), 13 (length of presentation), and 14 (# of days). The answers show that the respondents generally thought that 49 papers was about the right number, they were able to attend most of the talks they were interested in despite having parallel sessions, they favored talks of 25-30 minutes in length (including 5 minutes for questions), and having POPL run for three full days.

POPL 2011 Feedback Survey

1. I am primarily associated with	student	academia (non-student)	industry	gov't Lab	other
	55	65	17	7	1

POPL 2011 Technical Program

2. The papers presented interesting material	strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
	55	84	12	1	0
3. The talks were well presented	strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
	34	101	11	6	0
4. The technical quality of papers was high	strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
	60	76	10	0	0
5. The presented papers in my area of work were relevant	strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
	45	81	19	6	0

6. The **number** of papers accepted was
 too many about right too few
 9 133 4
7. Even with parallel sessions, I was **able to attend** most of the talks I was interested in
 strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree
 40 83 10 17 3
8. As a submitting author, the **reviews** I received were thorough and fair
 strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree NA
 26 29 6 5 0 77

General POPL Technical Policies

9. POPL 2011 allowed authors to write **rebuttals** to reviews. I think that author rebuttal is
 very useful useful neutral not useful harmful
 55 68 14 6 0
11. POPL should have **a best presentation award**
 strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree
 31 36 43 27 14
12. In addition to the 10-year paper award, POPL should give out **distinguished paper awards**
 strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree
 18 43 57 22 9
13. The **length** of POPL presentations (including questions) should be
 30 mins 25 mins 20 mins 15 mins
 82 41 24 2
14. This year POPL was 3 full days. The **length** should be
 2.5 days 3 days
 13 135
15. Future POPLs should have more opportunities for socializing and fun
 strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree
 21 48 67 12 0
16. Future POPLs should have an outing/social event, even if it increases the registration cost by \$75
 strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree
 9 32 57 40 11
17. This year the primary way we distributed POPL proceedings at the conference was on a USB stick.
 Which approach to releasing papers would you prefer?
 USB stick hardcopy proceedings download via Internet CDROM other – explain
 86 31 36 4

POPL 2011 Location

18. The location of POPL 2011, **Austin, Texas**, USA made it more likely that I would attend
 strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree
 29 37 58 24 5

19. The **conference facilities** (internet, location, etc.) met my needs

strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
29	77	29	16	4

20. The **meals and break food** met my needs

strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
27	80	28	14	6

21. I stayed at the **conference hotel**

yes	no
88	65

22. My **accommodations** met my needs

strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
43	84	19	1	1

General POPL Organization Policies

23. Given a choice of an "interesting/higher cost" location or a "less interesting/lower cost" **location**, I would prefer

interesting/higher cost	less interesting/lower cost
72	66

24. Regardless of the location, I will not attend POPL if the nightly **hotel costs** are above

\$150	\$200	\$250	\$300	doesn't matter
21	59	29	9	25

25. Regardless of location, I will not attend POPL if the early **registration costs** for POPL are above

\$500	\$550	\$600	\$650	\$700	doesn't matter
23	13	28	15	16	42

26. I will not pay more than the following for **wireless internet** access in the meeting room:

Only if it is free	\$5/day	\$10/day	\$15/day	\$20/day
106	25	14	3	2

27. If POPL were held in the Pacific Rim area (China, Korea, Japan, Australia, etc.) would you attend?

Yes	Probably	Not Sure	Unlikely	No
48	34	37	26	8

28. Do you plan to **attend POPL'12**?

Yes	Probably	Not Sure	Unlikely	No
38	53	56	6	3

29. Which **week** of January do you prefer to have POPL on?

Week#1	Week#2	Week#3	Week#4
8	27	51	64

30. Which **three days of the work week** do you prefer to have the POPL technical program on?

Mon-Tue-Wed	Tue-Wed-Thu	Wed-Thu-Fri
19	20	78

Written Survey Comments

Here are the written survey comments, clustered by subject.

Date

- “Please don’t overlap with CAV/CADE deadlines.”

Topics

- “Too much conflict in workshop/tutorial [topics]”.

Reviewing

- “This year’s reviewing process was much improved over recent years. Keep up that good work!”

Food

- On meals and breaks: “Some were great, others mediocre. Please make protein items available at breakfast, not just carbs.”
- “Less processed food.”
- “More healthy snacks, e.g. more fruit.”
- “The workshop breakfasts were particularly sub-par in comparison to other conferences and workshops I’ve been too.”
- “The vegetarian meals were very bad. They didn’t have enough nutrition for me.”
- “Provide for non-iced water (I had to go buy water from outside the hotel. Iced water gives me a headache.)”
- “Food should be of high quality. Fruit in the breaks.”

Audio/Visual

- “The project screens were too low – please try to get above head level.”
- “Make sure projector screen is ‘high up’.”
- “Microphones were rarely loud enough!”
- “Provide for a more ergonomical presentation podium; I had back pain giving my presentation.”
- “The bottom of the projection screen was not always visible (obscured by the audience). The podium was on a very small stage. I like to pace around to improve the dynamism of my presentation, so a bigger stage would have been nice.”
- “Readable screens (lower half).”

Parallel Tracks

- “No parallel sessions!”
- “Parallel sessions are the reality.”
- “On top of that there were load balance problems between the parallel tracks.”
- “Multi track requires bigger rooms.”
- “It’s great that more papers were accepted. Parallel sessions worked out ok but the conference rooms were too small and not accessible enough (only 1 entrance). I strongly encourage POPL to do parallel sessions next time but plan for them earlier, when selecting location and hotel.”

- “Two talks per session is better for parallel sessions. Since it is not easy to move from a session to another session, the only time to move is during the breaks.”

Videotaping

- “Videotaping helps with parallel sessions (and should be done regardless).”
- “I would like to see videotaping of presentations become a regular occurrence at POPL, especially with parallel tracks.”

Space/Room Concerns

- “The rooms were too cozy this year.”
- “The conference meeting rooms got quite crowded; bigger rooms would have made it more pleasant (the screens were hard to read).”
- “The only deficiency was the small size of the rooms. But it was BIG deficiency.”
- “The conference room was really inadequate. No tables and talks difficult to see.”
- “Need bigger room for talks.”
- “Foyer (coffee area) was too small at POPL 2011.”
- “Larger hotel room would help with parallel session. More space for coffee breaks would have improved the experience.”
- “The rooms for the presentations were too small.”
- “More space for seating!”
- “Rooms need to be larger – some talks had standing room only.”
- “Provide for chairs with armrests or tables in front. I am too old to sit on such chairs as were in the rooms for long.”
- “Meeting rooms in parallel session were too small.”
- “We should have larger conference room.”
- “Meeting rooms with daylight; no noise from other talks.”

Cost

- “Look for less expensive accommodation.”
- “Cheaper hotel.”
- “Hotel costs are harder to justify internally, than say, registration fee/airline ticket.”
- “Conference costs are minor compared to travel costs (including food, lodging) and time off work costs. I’m in a small company, so I can’t defray these costs into big pockets; expensive locations are fundamentally prohibitive.”
- “Hotel is too high class. I don’t need this luxury.”

Power

- “More outlet plugs and table setting would be even better.”

Location

- “I don’t understand why POPL is organized in a hotel. Conferences organized in universities are cheaper and have access to better facilities, plus a nicer academic environment.”

- “Having the conference at the sleepover hotel generally reduces the quality of the auditorium infrastructures.”
- “Austin was interesting and lower cost. I prefer that.”

Internet

- “Some [employers] (mine for example) restrict us from attaching our work computers to the public internet. Please provide access to terminals/workstations for internet access.”

Socializing

- “Small group activities like Tom’s ‘fun run’ are more cost-effective than an outing.”
- “Great job overall! I feel that in the social areas, outside the meeting rooms, more tables and chairs would be nice for socializing.”
- “Make sure there is adequate seating for breakout work and individual interaction – this was not the case here.”

Miscellany

- “The registration staff and organizers were very good. Thank you.”
- “Just thank you!”
- “Tom Ball and Mooly Sagiv rock!”
- “Great job Mooly!!”
- “Whiteboards.”
- “Incorporate student presentation session into the main schedule.”
- “Decouple Microsoft games from POPL!”
- “Make a couple of free registrations for the next year POPL among the raffle drawing prizes.”