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# First Early Career Researchers' Roundtable for Information Access Research

CHIIR 2022 Full Day Workshop

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## ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we work, study, and conduct research. Ongoing stresses and uncertainties of the pandemic have impacted research activities and collaborations, especially for *graduate researchers*<sup>1</sup> and *Early Career Researchers (ECRs)*<sup>2</sup>. It has also changed the way we connect with the broader research communities. For example, in the last year, conferences were either postponed or held online. Even though many conferences implemented social activities, connecting online with peers is hard. Thus, serendipity and forming new bonds or research connections at conferences have been more complex. Indeed, graduate researchers and ECRs have increased challenges connecting and establishing new research connections in online driven environments. This workshop aims to empower graduate and ECRs, make new research connections, and foster a sense of belonging.

The *First ECRs Roundtable on Information Access Research* workshop at ACM CHIIR'22 looks into the future of research, collaborations, and self-development to ask the following.

- *Where are the opportunities for researchers in a (post-)pandemic environment, especially for ECRs?*
- *What do we need to do to get there?*
- *Which practical implementations can the broader CHIIR community support?*

The workshop is hands-on and interactive—with two key talks to kick-start discussion. Rather than a series of technical talks, we solicit position statements from attendees on opportunities, problems, and solutions on (post-)pandemic research on information access within the wider CHIIR community. Building on work presented at *ACM CHIIR 2021* [10], this workshop empowers attendees to share their *do's* and *don'ts*, review their practices for success, and refine which strategies work for them. The workshop provides a neutral platform for an open and honest discussion about the

<sup>1</sup>By *graduate researchers*, we mean either: *Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)*, *Master of Philosophy (MPhil)*, a *Masters by Research*, *Doctorate*, or other graduate research degree.

<sup>2</sup>ECRs are typically emerging researchers within their first five to eight years of academic or other research-related employment, following completion of graduate research degree. There is no age limit on who can be an ECR but is defined by the researcher's career progression.

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*lessons learned from working in a pandemic*. Outcomes include a technical report written by the attendees.

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## 1 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

The COVID-19 pandemic impacts research productivity, particularly for graduate researchers, ECRs, female academics, and caregiving researchers [2, 5, 8]. It has been suggested that ECRs have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic [5, 8], and that different factors have been contributing to the inequitable impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on ECRs. For example, many ECRs have experienced increased teaching requirements or administrative responsibilities, especially with online learning. Furthermore, important networking and training opportunities helping ECRs progress in their career and collaborations have also been impacted [12]. Other factors such as limited participant recruitment for studies hinder ongoing research. In addition, many junior researchers are impacted by general recruitment freezes or financial limits from universities [4]. These factors affect the ECRs' demonstration of independent research, advancement in science, or job securities.

We propose to use this workshop as a vehicle for an in-depth, open, and *honest* discussion about an individual's *research journey* in the current pandemic, which obstacles or opportunities have been faced, and practical solutions to these problems. We wish to engage with any current and prospective ECRs, but especially with graduates and ECRs. This workshop is not intended to replace supervision, support, or self-development researchers from the researcher's institution. Instead, we aim to present this workshop as peer-to-peer exchange of experiences and strive to provide a platform for discussing different methods individuals have used to succeed in their everyday work. We aim this workshop to be a springboard for researchers, and instil them with confidence to reach out to more senior researchers, celebrate successes, handle inevitable disappointments, and encourage participation within the CHIIR community. Indeed, we also aim to invite senior academics to be part of this conversation. This workshop is not exhaustive—nor should it be considered as a definitive resource. It should, however, act as a stepping stone to a more well-connected and strengthened research community—especially at the junior level.

## 1.1 Workshop Format

The full-day workshop is formatted around *two blocks* to accommodate the hybrid conference format (and different timezones). Before the workshop, participants have been asked to share obstacles or opportunities they faced concerning research during the pandemic. These *statements* are used to guide the discussion. The organisers sorted the statements prior to the workshop, and allocated them to the two blocks. The two blocks then each focus on two different topics—that is *research* and *meta-research* related topics. These themed blocks have the main presentation to kickstart the session, followed by the discussion of the participants’ position statements and roundtable<sup>3</sup> discussion. Workshop participants contribute to a written technical report similar to the *Future Conversations workshop* at CHIIR’21 [9].

## 1.2 Committee Format

The secondary aim of this workshop is to create a *circular workshop economy* approach in which we train and incorporate a committee to act as a learning and networking forum for junior researchers. The steering and program committee setup is in such a way to foster ongoing workshops and connections of *roundtables* for information access research. We include a mix of junior and senior members to promote a sustainable, long-lasting workshop environment.

## 2 EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The outcomes of this workshop are threefold: (i) to enhance the sense of connectedness with the CHIIR community; (ii) to encourage *roundtable* discussions and debates on the topic of research during a global pandemic; and (iii) to create a technical report describing the statements, responses, and discussions which can act as a resource for both junior and senior researchers.

This workshop increases the participant’s sense of purpose, capability, connectedness with their community, and resourcefulness to enhance a sense of culture [6]. In addition, this workshop creates novel ideas on how to optimise research, especially for young researchers, and emphasise that research does not only follow a solo path of learning and self-development, but is instead a *shared journey*. By taking part in this workshop, attendees acquire knowledge, a peer support network, as well as skills and competencies with:

- time management and planning tools;
- collaborative online writing tools;
- online researcher profile and presence;
- a better understanding of the common pitfalls that may be encountered, and what can be potentially done to solve them;
- an improved understanding of how to communicate to others about their research.

## 3 ORGANISERS

The organisers for this workshop are Johanne Trippas and David Maxwell. Johanne and David first met as PhD students at the 24<sup>th</sup> ACM CIKM in Melbourne, Australia, in 2015. At the inaugural ACM CHIIR in 2016, they met again at the Doctoral Consortium, where they have developed a strong and long-lasting friendship.

<sup>3</sup>Roundtable is a discussion forum. Participants agree on particular topics to discuss and debate. Each participant is given equal right to participate, as represented by the notion of a circular layout suggested in the term *roundtable*.

As colleagues, Johanne and David have recently presented a similar tutorial at ACM CHIIR 2021 [10]. They were invited to give a keynote address at the *ECIR 2021* Doctoral Consortium.<sup>4</sup>

**Johanne Trippas** (<http://johannetrippas.com>) – Dr Trippas is a *Doreen Thomas Research Fellow* at the *University of Melbourne*, Australia. She obtained her PhD in Computer Science from *RMIT University*, Australia. Recently, her work has focused on developing next-generation capabilities for intelligent systems, including spoken conversational search, digital assistants in a cockpit, and Artificial Intelligence to identify cardiac arrests. She has been a *SIGIR* Student Liaison, has co-organised several tutorials and workshops [1, 3, 11], and the Russian Summer School on Information Retrieval 2020 (cancelled due to COVID-19). Furthermore, Johanne is actively involved in the *SIGIR* community and was recently appointed as vice-chair of the *SIGIR* Artifact Evaluation Committee.

**David Maxwell** (<http://www.dmax.org.uk/>) – Dr Maxwell is a postdoctoral researcher at *Delft University of Technology (TU Delft)* in the Netherlands, working with Dr Claudia Hauff. He graduated with a PhD in IIR from the *University of Glasgow*, Scotland. David has delivered well-received talks on his experiences during his time as a PhD student, from discussing his research to sharing the positive and negative experiences that he faced. Recently, he has released an online guide highlighting the challenges (and potential solutions) [7]. Discussions with his peers at Glasgow led to the acute realisation that *sharing is indeed caring*—with a realisation that being open, frank, and honest about your experiences leads to an appreciation and openness from others.

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