

The Imposter Panel

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PANEL OBJECTIVE

This panel is a reprise of the immensely popular Imposter Panel organized by our colleague from Microsoft, Kori Inkpen, at Grace Hopper 2008. The popularity of that panel (which packed its room to standing-space-only) demonstrated that the “imposter syndrome” is an issue that resonates strongly with the Grace Hopper community. Consequently, we propose preserving the format and theme of last year’s Imposter Panel, but with an entirely new set of panelists, so that attendees can obtain additional insights into this complex issue.

The ‘imposter syndrome’ is a common yet typically unacknowledged condition where those experiencing it have difficulties believing in and internalizing their own accomplishments. The secretly self-proclaimed ‘imposters’ feel that they have not earned their success, that they have somehow “tricked” others in order to achieve their current status, and that they are at risk of being discovered for the imposters that they are.

Our goal in this panel is to communicate to the attendees how pervasive this phenomenon is even among highly successful women – both in academia and in industry, and at various stages in their careers. The panel will provide an opportunity for audience members to see that they are not alone in having “imposter” fears, and to hear how the distinguished panelists have coped with and surmounted challenges in self-confidence.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Anyone who has ever experienced the “imposter syndrome” or related crises of self-confidence.

PANEL FORMAT

Each panelist will introduce herself (about 5 minutes per person). In the introduction, each panelist will first highlight her accomplishments

in the field of computing. Each panelist will then confess that, despite her many accomplishments, she sometimes feels like an imposter, and will relate a couple of anecdotes illustrating these imposter episodes.

The panelists will then take questions from the audience. We expect that there will be quite a few questions, based on this panel’s success in past years, since this is an issue that resonates with the Grace Hopper audience. However, if there is a shortage of questions from the audience, the panel moderators will ask the panelists questions such as:

- Is it okay to feel like an imposter? Should I try to fix it?
- What’s wrong with me? Why do I feel this way?
- Is it just me?
- How can I cope with these feelings of inadequacy?
- Will it ever change?

The panel discussion will last for approximately 1 hour.

PANELISTS

In order to resonate with women with various career interests, and at various stages in their careers, we plan to structure the panel to include women from both academia and industry, and at both junior and senior career stages. Thus, the final panel will consist of five members:

- Industry (senior): Jennifer Tour Chayes
- Industry (junior): Rachel Weinstein Petterson
- Academia (senior): Nancy M. Amato
- Academia (junior): Tanzeem Choudury
- Panel Moderator: Meredith Ringel Morris

Biographies of our panelists follow.

Jennifer Tour Chayes (Microsoft)

Jennifer Tour Chayes is managing director of the new Microsoft Research New England lab in Cambridge, Massachusetts which opened in July 2008. Before this, she was research area manager for Mathematics, Theoretical Computer Science and Cryptography at Microsoft Research Redmond. Chayes joined Microsoft Research in 1997, when she co-founded the Theory Group. Her research areas include phase transitions in discrete mathematics and computer science, structural and dynamical properties of self-engineered networks, and algorithmic game theory. She is the co-author of almost 100 scientific papers and the co-inventor of more than 20 patents.

Rachel Weinstein Petterson (Google)

Rachel Weinstein Petterson is a software engineer at Google, in Mountain View, CA, where she is active in Google's women engineers group. Prior to joining Google, she was an R&D engineer at Industrial Light & Magic, where her work was incorporated into the Hollywood blockbuster, Transformers. Dr. Petterson received her bachelor's degree in computer science from Brown University, and completed her doctoral studies at Stanford University, where her research focused on physical simulation and control of joints for animated characters. She was a Google Anita Borg Memorial Scholarship Finalist in 2007.

Nancy M. Amato (Texas A&M University)

Nancy M. Amato is a professor of computer science and engineering at Texas A&M University where she co-directs the Parasol Lab and is chair of the university-level Alliance for Bioinformatics, Computational Biology, and Systems Biology. Her main areas of research focus are motion planning and robotics, computational biology and geometry, and parallel and distributed computing. Dr. Amato has received numerous awards recognizing her contributions in research, teaching and service. She is a recipient of a prestigious NSF CAREER Award, is a Distinguished Speaker for the ACM Distinguished Speakers Program, was a Distinguished Lecturer for the IEEE Robotics and Automation Society (2006-2007), and currently co-directs the CDC/CRA-W Distributed Research Experiences for

Undergraduates (DREU) program and the CDC/CRA-W Distinguished Lecture Series (DLS). Dr. Amato received undergraduate degrees in Mathematical Sciences and Economics from Stanford University, and M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in Computer Science from UC Berkeley and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Tanzeem Choudury (Dartmouth College)

Tanzeem Choudury is an assistant professor of computer science at Dartmouth College, where she works on developing machine learning techniques for systems that can reason about human activities, interactions, and social networks in everyday environments. Prior to joining the faculty at Dartmouth, Prof. Choudury was a member of the research staff at Intel Research Seattle for four years. Dr. Choudury was named one of 2008's "35 innovators under 35" by Technology Review magazine, and has received a prestigious NSF CAREER award. She earned her Ph.D. from MIT's Media Laboratory.

Meredith Ringel Morris (Microsoft & Univ. of Washington)

Meredith Ringel Morris is a researcher in the Adaptive Systems and Interaction group at Microsoft Research in Redmond, WA. She is also an affiliate assistant professor of computer science and engineering at the University of Washington. Dr. Morris received her bachelor's degree in computer science from Brown University, and her master's and doctorate degrees in computer science from Stanford University. Her research focuses on the design and evaluation of technologies for collaborative work, such as multi-touch tabletop computers and multi-user Web search systems. Dr. Morris was named one of 2008's "35 innovators under age 35" by Technology Review magazine.