Conferences confronted by challenges of maturity

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The systems conferences are approaching a crisis point

- Overwhelmed by numbers of submissions, hard to convince people to do the PC job properly
- Many signs of this “stress”

We need to fix these problems before they cause some form of collapse
Why are the numbers of papers so high?
- Students feel huge pressure to have a lot of papers
- … but they also feel that conferences are a roll of the dice, hence tend to “gamble” by submitting a lot

Why are conferences rolling the dice?
- Mostly due to issues in the first round
- The PC doesn’t really get involved until late in the second round, except the most dedicated members
The First Round

- Ken assigns 30 papers to Mary Smith
  - Mary shudders and goes into denial
  - Eventually farms out a lot of the work to her students
  - Many of these have very little experience

- Back come reviews (with scores!)
  - And lots of good papers bite the dust

- The PC does a much better job on those that survive
Could we fix this?

- By any reasonable estimate the systems community numbers in the thousands
  - Just track past participants in SOSP, SI COMM, OSDI, NSDI, etc
  - Many have published, many attend lots of conferences.

- Why not have our own community do the first round reviewing, using a “social networking” approach that HotCRP (or Google) could support?
More ideas

- My paper lists other ideas...
  - Clear the backlog the way medical conferences do: by accepting a LOT more papers as “communications”
    - Key: they need to be citable on your CV and included into the proceedings (in a “communications” section)
  - Evokes a vision of short papers. But in fact, why not eliminate length restrictions completely?
    - Review based on 6-8 page extended abstracts but (all) papers could be as long as the material demands
  - Institutionalize rebuttal opportunities
  - Track histories of reviews (and lives of papers...)