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Global network science conference opens



Albert-László Barabási, distinguished professor of physics, speaks at the NetSci 2010 conference.
Photo by Mary Knox Merrill

May 10, 2010

Network scientists and researchers in the arts and humanities converged at Northeastern University Monday to kick off an annual conference that seeks to expand research in network science and foster new collaborations between researchers from across the globe.

The highly interdisciplinary science of networks — which examines complex systems and processes that exhibit network behavior, from biological systems in the body to the shifting networks formed by social media websites — has grown rapidly in the last decade. That growth is due to the rising amount of network-relevant data

available to researchers, according to Maximilian Schich, an art historian and visiting research scientist at Northeastern University's **Center for Complex Network Research (CCNR)**.

The CCNR, led by a pioneer in network science, Distinguished Professor of Physics **Albert-László Barabási**, is considered the leading university-based center for network science research in the world.

Monday's Arts | Humanities | Complex Networks symposium was a satellite workshop of NetSci 2010 — a weeklong conference being jointly held by Northeastern University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Schich says there was a feeling last year that arts and the humanities were underrepresented at the conference compared with other topics such as mathematics, physics, biology, and economics. As a result, organizers wanted to bring arts and the humanities to the forefront this year with its own full-day workshop.

"We are striving to expand and foster cross-disciplinary research on complex networks, within or with the help of arts and humanities," Schich said.

"This is the coolest session we've done so far at NetSci, and if we start this way, I have very high hopes for the [conference]," added Barabási, a co-organizer of NetSci 2010.

The symposium examined research areas such as archeology, art history, music, literature and film. In one presentation, researchers charted networks of words throughout published works such as "Romeo and Juliet" and the Bible, as well as those based on Google searches. Another presentation detailed research analyzing the wide network of photographs posted on social media websites — which, for instance, could lead to studying patterns of how people move through the world based on the cities and landmarks highlighted in the photos.

The symposium was co-chaired by Isabel Meirelles, associate professor in Northeastern's **Department of Art + Design**, and Roger Malina, executive editor at Leonardo, an international journal focusing on the application of science and technology to the arts and music.

The NetSci conference is traditionally divided into two sections. The "school" portion, held at Northeastern, offers a series of lectures and tutorials to introduce tools and results on various research areas in network science. The "conference" portion, held at MIT, focuses on talks presenting the latest research in network science.

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The school portion began Monday and continues on Tuesday at Northeastern's Shillman Hall with a morning discussion on "Economic Networks" and afternoon discussions on "Dynamics on Networks" and "Biological Networks."

For more information on the entire NetSci 2010 conference, visit <http://netsci2010.net/program.php>

For more information on the Arts | Humanities | Complex Networks symposium, visit <http://artshumanities.netsci2010.net/>

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