

IEEE Information Theory Society Board of Governors Meeting

Location: Palmer House, Chicago, USA

Date: 6 October 2018

Time: The meeting convened at 9:00am CDT (GMT-6); the meeting adjourned at 3:43pm.

Meeting Chair: Elza Erkip

Minutes taken by: Stark Draper

Meeting Attendees:



approved process, the BoG officers will select **these** candidates with additional nominations from the BoG if there are any. Aylin will become the 2019 VP nominee. **Next**, Elza reviewed the process for additional nominations. After the nominees made by the officers are announced, the BoG has one week to suggest additional nominations. Any nominees must (i) be current members of the BoG, must (ii) agree to serve, and (iii) at least two BoG members must support the nomination. Once step two is complete, step three will follow. Step three is the standard process for electing (via email) the 2019 2VP, VP and President. After the election of the officers is complete, the BoG position of Tsachy Weissman, who resigned his position as regular BoG member and whose term last through 31 Dec 2020,

behaviors that convey insulting, hostile and degrading attitudes), (2) unwanted sexual attention, (3) sexual coercion.

Elza then took a step back asking the BoG to consider what is the culture of ITSoc. She posited the first to be an emphasis on deep mathematical understanding; the second to value quality over quantity; and the third to be a small and tight-knit society. This last aspect helps foster a strong sense of community but can make conflicts harder to deal with since many (perhaps most) Society members have relationships that are both professional and personal with their colleagues. Returning to the events of the past year, Elza stated that it was a difficult year and we were tested. The root of the difficulties was a highly publicized sexual harassment case involving an ITSoc faculty member and an ITSoc student member. That case induced emotional responses from many, resulting in severe disagreements on how to react, with an overall result that impacted the society climate in a tremendously negative way. Returning to the National Academy report, Elza again emphasized that climate is a key factor in helping to prevent sexual harassment.

Elza then reviewed the reaction of the BoG and the Society. In the February 2018 BoG meeting the BoG reaffirmed an IEEE Code of Conduct and Ethics, accepted in principle a draft conference code of conduct presented by some BoG members, and formed an ad-hoc committee on Diversity and Inclusion, one of the mandates of which included finalizing the conference code of conduct. In the June 2018 meeting the BoG passed a statement on sexual harassment, which was followed by a discussion at the BoG meeting and the aforementioned Wednesday morning discussion at ISIT. The road involved severe objections, incurred a high emotional toll, and created deep divisions in the society.

Elza then looked to events in other societies to see how those societies reacted. She first considered what happened at NIPS'17. There a band of statisticians made crude remarks about sexual harassment. Following that on 13 December 2017 Kristian Lum wrote an article for Medium on her experience with sexual harassment and posted a comment on her Twitter feed. The first reply to her post was a comment from the President of the International Society for Bayesian Analysis (ISBA) condemning harassment, and establishing a task team for a safe ISBA meeting. That was followed by lots of on-line discussion. About seven months later at the Joint Statistics Meeting (JSM), there was a late-breaking session "Addressing Sexual Misconduct in the Statistics Community". The session was large (it needed to be moved to a larger room) and was well received. Elza's point was that the statistics community reacted more quickly and materially than did ITSoc.

A second recently highly-publicized case was in the philosophy community. In this case a female professor at New York University harassed her male student. Similar to ITSoc a letter of support was written by about 50 colleagues of the professor suggesting her innocence and that her status and reputation may earn her deference treatment. This case was also widely reported—including in the New Yorker, the Atlantic, the Chronicle of Higher Education—and also engendered lots of open discussion within the community. Many of those latter pieces focused on the support letter, one signatory of which was the president-elect of the modern languages society. Some signatories later recanted their letter of support.

Beyond professional societies, the National Science Foundation (NSF) instituted a new

Coming back to ITSoc Elza stated that the BoG must provide leadership. While the BoG has passed statements it / we need to work to make sure that the climate of the society is where it should be. While the culture of the society values consensus, we should not be afraid to disagree, and should be prepared to tackle difficult issues. We should always disagree civilly. Elza's key message to BoG was: do not be afraid to disagree, but do so civilly. ITSoc also needs better processes. Today the BoG will consider the revised Conference Code of Conduct. It also needs

that the BoG make a public statement about the situation, but the IEEE advised the officers not to post publicly anything too specific. Some BoG member expressed regret in not having been more public about their opinions and in support of the ITSoc student involved. One BoG member stated that they very much stand by the public statement they had posted and do continue to think the BoG and officers collectively could have done better. Generally, some present felt that, in contrast to other societies, discussions within ITSoc have been more closed and limited to the BoG, with less being communicated to the broad membership. Other BoG members expressed appreciation of the care that the BoG took in approaching what to say publicly, but noted that things move much more quickly on social media than in the past.

Elza pointed out that in the spring she referred to some BoG members' web postings regarding the events in ITSoc on her Facebook page. This led to lots of push back. Elza thought that, perhaps, what we lacked was not the posting of official statements on the ITSoc website but the ability to have an open discussion. Even the holding of a discussion at the ITSoc BoG meeting in Vail in June 2018 led to severe objections. Perhaps to move forward constructively we can focus on three things. First, we need to trust each others' intention, while agreeing to disagree. Second, we can all think back to what each of us we

Aaron next discussed new initiatives for 2019. The budget for new initiatives is \$120k. There are three components. The first is \$40k for special sessions at ISIT 2019 (people from industry and people in other areas of research connected to IT). The second is \$40k for two other outreach workshops. The third is \$40k for phase-II upgrade to the ITSoc web server.

- 3) **Motion to change order of the agenda:** A motion was made to reorder some agenda items in order to maintain quorum as some BoG members needed to depart early.

Motion: "To change the order of the agenda." The motion was passed unanimously.

- 4) **Journal of Selected Topics in Information Theory (JSTIT):** Chair of the JSTIT Steering

of Special Topics in Signal Processing (JSTSP) provides the Signal Processing Society a net annual income of about \$100k USD.

Jeff next reviewed the proposed leadership structure. JSTIT will have a steering committee, an EiC nominated via an open and transparent process that is subject to BoG approval, and 8-12 senior editors of diverse areas of research to guide submissions. Each special issue will have its own guest editorial team. The EiC will serve a single non-renewable three year term. The proposed process for appointing the EiC is as follows. First, there will be an open call for nominations. Second, the Steering Committee will also solicit and make their own nominations. Third, the Steering Committee will choose from the nominees, confirming interest and availability of the candidate. Fourth, the Steering Committee will submit their nomination to the ITSoc BoG for approval. Regarding the JSTIT Steering Committee, there would be five members with staggered five-year terms. One member would retire each year with the replacement appointment being made by the VP of the Publications Committee (currently the senior past president of ITSoc). The Chair of the Steering Committee would be chosen by the Steering Committee itself.

Regarding the nominations of the JSTIT EiC, BoG members raised the point that ITSoc already has a Nominations and Appointments (N&A) Committee. Jeff was asked why not simply have the EiC nomination come from from N&A rather than from the JSTIT Steering Committee? Further, it was asked why not also have members of the JSTIT Steering Committee be appointed by the N&A Committee? Jeff noted that the VP of the Publications Committee (as already noted the senior past president of ITSoc), who would be making the appointments to the JSTIT Steering Committee, also chairs the ITSoc N&A Committee. Thinking forward to the possibility of ITSoc having three publications (Magazine, JSTIT and the Transactions), some BoG members indicated that in such an eventuality, it could make sense to have a separate position of VP of Publications. It was generally recognized that the new journal affects the structure of the Publications Committee. Currently in the ITSoc Bylaws the Publications Committee is focused on the Transactions. Thus, the Bylaws will need to be reexamined.

BoG members then asked whether the JSTIT Steering Community would be formed of ITSoc members would aim to have members from outside of ITSoc. There was also a suggestion of having the Steering Committee chair simply be the longest-serving member of the committee. However, following on the previous point about including non-ITSoc members, it was discussed that it could make sense to have members of the steering committee that might not be interested to serve as chair. So, the proposed structure of the committee choosing its chair gives flexibility for such situations. Jeff also indicated that, generally, the steering committee wouldn't be concerned with the day-to-day operations of the journal. He contrasted the role of the proposed JSTIT Steering Committee with that of the Executive Editorial Committee of the Transactions. While the Steering Committee would be the governing body of JSTIT, the Executive Editorial Committee plays a more active role in the operations of the Transactions, e.g., helping the EiC of the Transactions make difficult decisions such as dealing with appeals.

Other suggestions raised by the BoG included the following. Contemplating the draft call-for-papers (CFP) BoG members suggested simply to require double-column submissions

Bringing the discussion to a close, Jeff reviewed next steps and the timeline. Assuming the BoG approves the process, the Phase Two proposal will be presented in Vancouver on 15 November. Regarding the appointment of an EiC, the aim is to start to receive EiC nominations by 15 November (perhaps with an extension) with the goal to have a confirmed JSTIT EiC in place by 01 January 2019. The Committee will also try to seed ideas for a few special issues with the initial CFPs to be released in early 2019, with first special issues to be approved in mid-late 2019, and the first issue to be published around March 2020.

As there was much discussion (above) in the meeting the BoG inquired whether they could approve the Phase Two proposal in principle today, and then let the finalized Phase Two proposal come back to the BoG for final vote. A point was made that when subcommittees are formed, the BoG typically places its faith in the committee without the need for detailed oversight of all the specific particulars.

Motion: “To approve moving forward with the JSTIT Phase Two proposal.” The motion was approved unanimously.

Motion: “To approve dissemination of a call for the JSTIT EiC.” The motion was approved unanimously.

There was a final discussion surrounding the call for the JSTIT EiC. The BoG inquired how the call would be distributed; e.g., through ITSoc email lists, directly to individuals, via the ITSoc website. A discussion of the phrasing of the call ensued whether, for instance, it was important to require the EiC to be an IEEE Fellow. As such a fixed requirement might narrow the pool of candidates it was decided to replace the clause “an IEEE Fellow” with “of suitable stature”.

- 5) Ad-Hoc Committee on Diversity and Inclusion (D&I):** Ad-hoc Committee Chair Elza Erkip next described to the BoG the efforts of the committee. Elza reviewed the forming of the committee in Feb 2018 and its composition. Updates since the ISIT BoG meeting include the development of (i) a best practices document for ITSoc schools, (ii) a charter for a proposed ITSoc standing committee on D&I, and (iii) a code of conduct for ITSoc conferences, workshops, and events. Regarding the code of conduct, the BoG will have a vote on approving the draft document. Elza noted that there is also an IEEE code of conduct in development. The BoG raised questions about the definition of under-represented groups (URGs), how they change over time and how the definition is allowed to evolve as, e.g., the geographic composition of ITSoc membership shifts. BoG member asked some questions about the specific duties of the committee, the composition, and the term of membership. Elza indicated that the document presented was the sketch asked for by the BoG in Vail with the essence to be distilled out by the Bylaws Committee next year. (The Bylaws Committee was working this year with only one member for the latter part of the year.) At the point that the committee is entered into the Bylaws the exact wording will become binding and therefore much more important and so will be dealt with through the regular process of changing the bylaws.

Motion: “Approve IEEE Information Theory Society Standing Committee on Diversity and Inclusion and its Charter.” The motion was approved unanimously.

Elza next presented the proposed ITSoc Conference Code of Conduct. There was a discussion of the actions that are promised in the statement. It was discussed that the specific text can be modified to suit the purposes of the event: “at the discretion of the conference chairs, an appropriate variant of the following note be displayed prominently in the conference programs/hand-outs/websites”. BoG member suggested that the code (or an appropriate variant thereof) be automatically sent to any conference registrant. Some

BoG members suggested that the D&I committee be added as a place to report any form of harassment or bullying experienced at ITSoc event. There was a discussion of whether or not the D&I Committee would be the appropriate group to report to. Some additions and modification of wording was suggested, but it was also noted that BoG approval of the motion does not preclude further improvements / additions to the statement. There was encouragement from the BoG to advertise the statement quickly and broadly.

Motion: "Approve IEEE Information Theory Society Conference Code of Conduct." passed unanimously.

- 6) **Newsletter:** There was a discussion of a piece that Tony Ephremides submitted to the ITSoc Newsletter. The submission is currently under review for possible publication. The BoG was asked to consider the piece. Many BoG members expressed their view that the submission provided an opinion on recent events in ITSoc that was not helpful in moving forward constructively. Numerous BoG members felt the submission could be discouraging to young researchers. Some BoG members thought that the piece could be published, though perhaps alongside other op-ed pieces that provide counterpoints. As Tony's regular Newsletter contributions have been entitled "The Historian's Column" BoG members asked what was the formal role of ITSoc "Historian". In fact, there is no such formal role. No role of ITSoc "Historian" is mentioned anywhere in the Bylaws or Constitution. The one place such a role is mentioned is in a task list provided to several ITSoc volunteers. Therein one annual task is for the president to appoint an historian, although no one present recalled such an appointment being made in recent years. BoG members asked what are the official columns of the ITSoc Newsletter. There are two: the President's Column and, at the discretion of the Transactions EiC, an EiC's column. There have been other regular contributors such as the late Solomon Golomb who contributed his "Puzzle Column". Some BoG members questioned the value of having a regular "Historian's Column", and the privileging of one person with a permanent and non-technical column, and suggested discontinuing the column all together. There was an agreement not to appoint anyone as historian in 2019.

In the context of the Newsletter evolving into a Magazine, as well as in response to concerns raised by the IEEE, there was a discussion of the oversight of the Newsletter. In

9)



Alon next described to the BoG that the the IEEE and the ITSoc officers differ on what “at most one” means. The IEEE believed that “at most one” means zero. The officers believe that “at most one” means zero or one. After some discussion, the IEEE agreed that the ITSoc officers’ interpretation is also valid and asked the BoG to vote to approve its interpretation. A BoG member pointed out that as the BoG has about 25 members and 5% of 25 is one, perhaps the intent of the Bylaws was indeed that “at most one” should be interpreted as zero. Alon then presented the following motion. Since at this point in the meeting, due to travel commitments of BoG members, the meeting had lost quorum, the following motion was presented and discussed, but not voted upon. Voting would be conducted by email following the meeting.

Motion: “The board interprets `at most one board member’ to mean zero or one board members, and hence that for the current board elections, Region 10 should be considered as under-represented.”

Finally the IEEE suggests rewording the Bylaws to be “less than two” though perhaps “strictly less than two” or “zero or one” would squash uncertainty on anyone’s part.