

IEEE Information Theory Society Board of Governors Meeting
Champaign, IL, September 23, 2008

João Barros

Attendees: Alexander Barg, João Barros, Giuseppe Caire, Daniel J. Costello Jr., Michelle Effros, Hesham El Gamal, Elza Erkip, Dave Forney, Andrea Goldsmith, Alex Grant, Tor Helleseth, Frank Kschischang, J. Nicholas Laneman, Muriel Médard, Fred Mintzer, Prakash Narayan, David L. Neuhoff, Alon Orlitsky, Anant Sahai, Amin Shokrollahi, Aylin Yener. Ken Zeger.

The meeting was called to order at 15:03 by Society President Dave Forney, who welcomed the members of the Board and their guests.

1. The agenda was approved by consent.
2. By consent, the Board approved the minutes of the previous meeting (Toronto, Canada, July 6, 2008).
3. The President reported that the Society continues to be in good financial shape, with a considerable surplus.

The President congratulated Giuseppe Caire on his election to Second Vice-President of the Society.

The President thanked Rob Calderbank, Ralf Koetter, Shlomo Shamai and David Tse for their service as members of the Board.

4. Division IX Director, Fred Mintzer, gave a presentation entitled "An Introduction to Division IX", which included information about the Societies that belong to Division IX and the duties of a Division Director. IEEE Membership has been increasing, whereas Society Membership has been decreasing. The Director also showed some concern with the cost of membership and the distance between practicing engineers and the IEEE, after they leave university.
5. The President and the Treasurer mentioned that there has been some consideration of transferring funds from the Society to the IEEE Foundation to endow the Shannon Award. If the officers decide that this is a good idea, the Treasurer will provide further details.

The President asked the Division IX Director about the solidity of the IEEE Foundation. The Director answered that everything has been under very close scrutiny.

6. The President noted that the Society has been a technical co-sponsor of the IEEE Transactions on Mobile Computing (TMC) since its inception, although its actual involvement has been negligible. He has been in touch with the TMC Steering Committee to ask whether there is any good reason for the Society to remain a technical co-sponsor. The TMC Board would like the Society to stay involved in order to encourage Society members to be involved in TMC and to offer member subscription rates to Society subscribers.

The President mentioned that the Society also technically co-sponsors the IEEE Transactions on Information Forensics and Security. Muriel Médard mentioned that the involvement of the Society in that publication is very active. As an example, Pierre Moulin is the Editor-in-Chief and Muriel Médard has been a Guest Editor-in-Chief for the last special issue.

The President moved that the Society withdraw from technical co-sponsorship of the IEEE Transactions on Mobile Computing. The motion passed unanimously.

7. Alex Grant presented the conference committee report. All workshops and conferences are on track.

Elza Erkip gave an update on the proposal for ISIT 2013 in Istanbul. Erdal Arikan and Elza Erkip would be the general co-chairs. Amos Lapidoth would join Emre Telatar and Jossy Sayir as co-chair of the Technical Program Committee. The organization committee is currently being completed. The proponents recommend delaying the signing of a contract due to the variations in currency exchange rates.

Michelle Effros raised the concern that the current economic situation justifies keeping the registration fees as low as possible. David Neuhoff mentioned the possibility of requesting the help of IEEE in negotiating with the conference venue. The Board discussed the effects of the current financial crisis on the budgeting and attendance of ISIT. It was the sense of the Board that the ISIT organizers should proceed to firm up their contractual commitments despite current economic uncertainties.

Hesham El Gamal presented a preliminary version of a proposal to hold an ITW 2010 in Cairo, Egypt, tentatively during the Winter. General Co-Chairs would be Hesham El Gamal and Andrea Goldsmith. The Technical Committee Co-Chairs would be Abbas El Gamal (Stanford) and Pramod Viswanath (UIUC). The proposed theme would be “Information Theoretic Foundations for the Wireless Revolution”. The venue would be the Mena House Oberoi, located very close to the Great Pyramid. One of the motivations is to support the Egyptian efforts in building an education and science infrastructure. The program would be 50% invited and 50% contributed.

On behalf of the organizers, Alex Grant presented a sketch proposal for an ITW in Dublin, Ireland, in August 2010. The focus would be on Mathematical Methods in Information Theory. Workshop co-chairs would be Marcus Greferath and Joachim Rosenthal.

8. Andrea Goldsmith reported on the activities of the Awards Committee. The official name of the joint award is IEEE Communications Society - Information Theory Society (Comsoc/ITSoc) Joint Paper Award. The eligibility window for this award in the future will be 3 years as defined in the IEEE awards document.

The Board discussed whether a paper should be precluded from receiving both awards. Amin Shokrolahi argued that if a paper is very good it should be allowed to win both awards. Alon Orlitsky stated that finding rules for preclusion is not an easy task. Daniel Costello expressed some concern that the situation of a paper winning both awards is likely to happen a lot. Michelle Effros suggested that the character of this award should be different from the IT paper award to avoid a ranking of awards.

Andrea Goldsmith presented the proposed amendments to the Society Bylaws, which correct some of the formulations related to awards. In particular, the Bylaws need to be updated with respect to the joint award and the procedures related to the ISIT Student Paper Award.

Alexander Barg raised the concern that the procedure is too complex and consequently subjective. In particular, he believes presentations should not be part of the evaluation. Muriel Médard defended that presentation skills are important, which justifies their inclusion in the set of criteria. Michelle Effros added that the presentation helps separate the contributions of student and advisor.

In response to a question by Prakash Narayan, Andrea Goldsmith clarified that the weight of the presentation component is lower than that of the other criteria. Alexander Barg asked what is meant by "dominant" author. Andrea Goldsmith explained this is left to the advisor.

The President pointed out that these amendments are work in progress.

Andrea Goldsmith reported on the status of the Baker Prize Paper Award, which will be reviewed by the IEEE Awards Board shortly.

The President announced that this year there will be a more formal nominating process for the Shannon Award including an open call, because of the increasing breadth of candidates who may be considered.

9. Muriel Médard presented the status on the Information Theory Society Outreach Effort. The first event at ISIT was very well intended. The next event will be led by Todd Coleman and will take place at the Allerton Conference. Muriel Médard compared the numbers of women participating in the IT, Signal Processing and Communications Societies. The President mentioned that the Society should be aware of these numbers, for example when forming technical program committees. Current efforts include a mailing list called `withits@mit.edu` for women in the Information Theory Society.
10. Frank Kschischang reported on the work of the Membership and Chapters Committee. The membership numbers rose by more than 200 members, mainly due to an initiative at ISIT, where IEEE members who were not IT members received a free half-year IT membership.

Frank Kschischang presented a detailed analysis of the current Distinguished Speakers Program, which was found not to be working well. The travel expense amount of 500 USD seems low, the criterion for distinguished speakers is not particularly compelling and the program is rarely taken advantage of. Based on the practices of other Societies, such as the Signal Processing Society, a proposal has been elaborated, in which 10 geographically and technically dispersed individuals would be appointed as distinguished lecturers, each with a nominal two-year term, extendable to 3 years provided that no more than one lecture has been given in the first two years. The budget would probably come to 20k USD per year.

Anant Sahai proposed recording lectures by Distinguished Speakers and making them available on-line.

Frank Kschischang made a motion that the proposal for a new IT Society Distinguished Speakers Program be accepted. The Board approved the motion unanimously.

The President discussed the officers' intention to increase the responsibilities of the Membership and Chapters Committee to cover various outreach efforts such as the Distinguished Speakers Program and the IT Schools, and to flesh out the membership of this committee. New members will be appointed by the incoming chair, Giuseppe Caire.

11. João Barros presented a proposal on behalf of Ralf Mueller for the 2009 IEEE Winter School on Coding and Information Theory, to be held in Trondheim, Norway, from March 29 to April 3. The President stated that the the European Winter School has been working well for a long time and deserves the Society's support. Ken Zeger asked about the high costs. João Barros answered that these are reasonable costs for Norway and a lot of effort has been put into cutting them down. Tor Helleseth vouched for the location.

João Barros presented a motion for the Society to grant 12k for the organization of this Winter School. The Board approved the motion unanimously.

12. Aylin Yener presented the report of the Student Committee. The last event at ISIT was very successful. The next Summer School will take place on August 2 to 6, 2009 at the Northwestern University Campus, Evanston, Chicago, IL.

Dave Neuhoff asked how the participants would be selected if the number of participants is limited to 100. The Board discussed several possible criteria, including student seniority and geographic proximity to the venue.

Aylin Yener presented a motion for the Board to approve a 10k grant to help support this Summer School. The Board approved the motion unanimously.

The President addressed the necessity of defining general criteria for awarding grants to IT schools. This task will be undertaken by the reconstituted Membership and Chapters Committee.

13. The Board expressed its appreciation for David Neuhoff's contributions as a Society officer.
14. Dave Neuhoff mentioned the need to nominate new members for the Nomination and Appointments Committee. Jim Massey and Ralf Koetter were nominated by Daniel J. Costello and Michelle Effros, respectively, for the Nomination and Appointments Committee. The Board shall vote on this issue via email.
15. Dave Neuhoff presented the recommendations of the Constitution and By-Laws Committee. This included a few amendments to Article V (Standing Committees), the details of which can be found on the Society's file server.

The Board approved the proposed amendments unanimously.

16. Nick Laneman reported on the status of the new IT Website, which is currently at 90% of completion. Society members are now able to introduce their profile information

onto the website independently. Chapters, Conferences and Committees will be able to create and maintain websites and file servers in a convenient way.

Frank Kschischang asked about a tentative release date. Nicholas Laneman explained that a timeline will be defined in the next few weeks. Release should occur before the end of the year.

The Treasurer asked whether there will be any additional requests for funds. Nicholas Laneman replied that none is planned, but more expenditures could be possible.

The President presented a motion that the Online Editor be allowed to expend an extra 10k USD on the web site development. The Board approved the motion unanimously.

17. Elza Erkip reported on new business pertaining Sirin Tekinay's position as program manager at NSF. Sirin Tekinay is currently working as a volunteer. Future program managers are also expected to be working on a volunteering basis. Several members of the Board expressed concern for this situation and its likely consequences for programs funding information theory research in the United States.
18. The Board thanked David Forney for his service as President.
19. Incoming President Andrea Goldsmith announced that the next Board meeting will be held on March 18 in Baltimore in conjunction with CISS. The other two 2009 Board meetings are likely to be on Sunday, June 28 in Seoul in conjunction with ISIT 2009, and on Sunday, October 11 in Taormina, Sicily in conjunction with an ITW.
20. The meeting was adjourned at 18:44.