ITSoc Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Committee

Report @ ITSoc Board of Governors Meeting, 20 March 2021

Committee: S. Draper (Chair), A. Yener (ex-officio), T. Coleman, V. Prabhakaran, N. Shah, M. Wigger

Four phases: (1) **Start-up**, Jul-Oct'20, (2) **Quick wins (QW)**, Sep-Dec'20, (3) **Assess & Analyze (AA)**, Oct'20-Aug'21, (4) **Build & Launch (BL)**, 2021-2022

Areas of effort (current emphasis in red):

- **Governance**
  - **ITSoc committee best practices (AA):** V. Prabhakaran & M. Wigger lead.
  - **Research D&I strategies in peer societies (AA):** both within IEEE (SPS, CommSoc) and outside (ML community); V. Prabhakaran & M. Wigger lead

- **Data**
  - **ITSoc D&I Climate Survey (AA):** building on similar surveys in peer communities (e.g., NeurIPS), particularize to ITSoc and deploy in conjunction with ISIT'21, will consider issues of climate in ITSoc broadly (not just at ISIT); N. Shah lead
  - **Provide data requested by TAB D&I Committee (QW):** includes both quantitative data & qualitative reporting on accomplishments and plans (to be submitted Sep. 2021); S. Draper lead

- **Activities**
  - **Efforts to expand and support community (BL):** thinking about ways to get undergraduates from underrepresented communities in both engaged in information theory and connected to ITSoc. The Center for Science of Information at Purdue had efforts in this direction, there is a new University-of-California "David Harold Blackwell Summer Research Program", ITSoc schools with their tutorial and student-oriented focus may be able to play a very useful role here; T. Coleman lead
  - **D&I Events at ISIT and otherwise (BL):** connecting with other efforts (WITHITS, Student & Outreach) within ITSoc and looking at what other societies have done (SPS, NeurIPS); V. Prabhakaran & M. Wigger lead

Governance: ITSoc committee best practices

Our charge (Bylaws): "The Committee is chaired with… developing and overseeing codes of conduct and best practices for all Society activities, including conferences, schools, and committees ."

- **To date:** Started by working with Awards, Conference, N&A, Schools Committees.

- **Request:** If you are a Committee Chair and your committee does not yet have a "best practices" document, please start on one by documenting your processes this year.

- **Learnings** from discussions to date:

  - **Respective roles of Bylaws and best practices**: Rules vs advisory/customs.

    - Best practices should be written with a close eye on the Bylaws.

    - The Bylaws evolve (very) slowly.

    - Best practices aren't binding, they should help committees set up their processes for the year. So, would ideally be designed to make them easy for the next chair to adopt. Best practices can particularly assist committees whose chairs turn over annually, and raise considerations that might be overlooked (not only from D&I perspective).

  - **Ongoing role** D&I Committee can play

    - Particularly for committees that turn over annually, D&I could help provide a longer-term view. E.g., based on discussions with committee chairs and last year's data provided to TAB, D&I can help monitor stream of nominations and committee make-up, suggest nominees for awards, work with N&A and editors of publications. Having the D&I Committee play a role might sometimes help avoid conflicts-of-interest.

    - From Bylaws extracted a list of appointments and when they are made — about 45 entries!

  - **Committee processes**

    - Discuss processes with committee each year. If appropriate agree to explicit decision criteria before start making decisions.

    - Consider making the process transparent, e.g., share on committee's ITSoc-hosted website how decision making processes are run (though, of course, not the details of each instance of that process).

Data: ITSoc D&I Climate survey

- **Team:** N. Shah (lead), working with T. Javidi & S. Draper

- **Objective:** Get data on D&I considerations within ITSoc

- **Peer Communities:** The Machine Learning community has been doing this for some years now. We have received permission to build off a NeurIPS'18 survey. Here is the link to that report:
  - http://users.umiacs.umd.edu/~hal/docs/daume18neuripsdi.pdf

- **Logistics:**
  - Want to deploy alongside ISIT'21, though survey will be broader than just ISIT-related issues.
  - Plan to use SurveyMonkey, e.g., works in China without VPN
  - Advertise via ITSoc mailing lists and other media.
  - Results compiled late July / early August

- **Timeline:**
  - Started revising NeurIPS survey to tune to ITSoc considerations.
  - Reached out to a number of committees including Student & Outreach, WITHITS, T-IT for input on any questions they would like us to add.
  - Committees have deadline of 15 April to get back to us
  - Initial draft by 30 April, run by officers / others, finalize by 31 May

- **Request**: Allocation of $1000 for support of survey (purchase of 10 x $50 give cards to incentivize participation, $276 for SurveyMonkey account, + $224 unexpected expenses)

Motion: "Approve $1000 for support of conducting the ITSoc D&I Climate survey"

Activities: Involving undergraduates from underrepresented groups

- **D&I Events at ISIT:** in the short-term to-do list, connecting with other committees WITHITS, Student & Outreach re: ISIT events.
- **Efforts to expand and support community:**
  - **Goal:** Get undergraduates from underrepresented communities in both engaged in information theory and connected to ITSoc.
  - **Examples**:
    - The Center for Science of Information at Purdue had efforts in this direction.
    - The new University-of-California "David Harold Blackwell Summer Research Institute" which involves T. Coleman (Stanford), W. Gangbo (UCLA), J. Nelson (UC Berkeley), see https://ww3.math.ucla.edu/david-harold-blackwell-summer-research-institute/
  - **Idea #1:** ITSoc travel scholarships for undergraduates from underrepresented groups
    - Expose students to ITSoc community and events early.
    - Target undergraduates who are working with / mentored by an ITSoc faculty member
    - Funding to attend an event (flights, registration waiver, hoteling)
    - Either require or strongly suggest that student be accompanied by sponsoring ITSoc member, or graduate student / postdoc in that PI's lab. This would facilitate introductions and more quickly engage student in community.
    - Preference for sponsoring multiple students to attend same event — help build a tight-knit group — could also sponsor dinner for students and accompanying mentors
    - ITSoc schools or ITA@UCSD might be especially good venues — more student and tutorial-oriented, schools somewhat uniformly located worldwide. That said, student and mentor could make case for any event.
    - Maybe 2 application opportunities per year to aid planning for spring/summer or fall/winter events.
  - **Idea #2:** Virtual ISIT'21 / ITSoc scholarships: Trial above idea inexpensively this year as ISIT'21 is virtual.

    Motion: "Approve $560 for support of scholarships for undergraduates from underrepresented groups to attend ISIT and ITSoc schools."