

Report on the Second Annual North American School of Information Theory

Aylin Yener and Gerhard Kramer

The Second Annual School of Information Theory was held during August 10-13, 2009, on the beautiful campus of Northwestern University in Evanston, IL. We are happy to report that the school was a great success.

As for last year's school at Penn State University, the goal was to offer graduate students and postdoctoral researchers an opportunity to interact with each other and with leading researchers and teachers of the field. We reported on the preparations for the event in the 2009 March and June Newsletters. The school experienced a 40% growth in student attendees from 101 in 2008 to 141 students this year. If we include our 4 speakers, 7 co-organizers, and 10 guests, the total number of attendees was over 160.

The school featured lectures by four of our favorite teachers. Dan Costello from the University of Notre Dame gave three lectures on Coding Theory; Bruce Hajek of UI Urbana-Champaign presented three lectures on Network Theory; Abbas El Gamal of Stanford University delivered the inaugural Padovani lecture with three talks on Multi-user Information Theory; and Bob Gallager of MIT gave the keynote lecture on The Early Development of Information Theory and What It Means for Today. As Dan, Bruce, and Abbas can attest, delivering 4.5 hours of lectures in one day is no mean feat! A picnic with a campfire was held on the evening of August 11 and a speaker & organizer dinner was held on the evening of August 12.

Student participation was a requirement for attendance: every student introduced his or her work in the form of a short (1-minute) talk as well as a poster presentation. The students took their presentations seriously and individuals could be seen explaining their work well after the poster sessions were officially over. The instructors participated actively in the poster sessions to the delight of the students.

An effort of this magnitude would not be possible without the enthusiastic assistance of many individuals. In particular, we are grateful to Randall Berry and Dongning Guo for their outstanding local organization; Daniela Tuninetti, Natasha Devroye, and Yalin Sagduyu for putting together a splendid program; Matthieu Bloch for his responsiveness and expert web programming (we couldn't have had anyone better). Maurice Parris provided assistance in accounting; Stephano Rini proved to be a talented photographer. The following student volunteers deserve our thanks for making the school a success: Jieying Chen, Hang Zhou, Jun Luo, Suvarup Saha, Ka Hung Hui, Lei Zheng, Changxin Shi, Echo Yang, Songqing Zhao, and Yang Weng.

The school was made possible by financial support from the IEEE Information Theory Society, the DARPA ITMANET program, ARO, NSF, the Northwestern University Master of Science in Information Technology Program, and funds provided by the University of Notre Dame, USC, and Roberto Padovani.

We now again arrive at the stage where we look forward to next year's school, and we will communicate the details on the 2010 organization as it proceeds. In the meantime, we invite you to browse the 2009 School website that has the lecture slides, video recordings of the lectures, and the student posters: please see

<http://www.itsoc.org/people/committees/student/2009-school-of-it>



Group photo before the picnic with Lake Michigan in the background.



Students enjoying Dan Costello's lectures on Coding Theory.



Students surrounding and gleaning wisdom from Bob Gallager.



The organization team (from right to left): Randall Berry, Dongning Guo, Yalin Sagduyu, Aylin Yener, Natasha Devroye, Daniela Tuninetti, Gerhard Kramer. Matthieu Bloch was unable to attend.