

ITSoc President's Report

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CISS BoG Meeting
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State of the Society: The current state of our society is excellent. We have healthy reserves and a strong income, so are well-poised to weather the short-term impact of market turmoil on IEEE's finances, although the long-term impact remains to be seen. The Information Theory Transactions is viewed as highly prestigious and consistently ranks as one of the most cited IEEE journals. Our field is becoming more interdisciplinary, embracing related and complementary disciplines through conference sessions, dedicated workshops, and Transactions special issues. Our members are frequently honored for their work with IEEE medals, technical field awards, and other international prizes, as well as with election to rarified national academies of engineering or science. The annual symposium and workshops on Information Theory are well-attended and of very high quality. The yearly decline in our membership over the last several years seems to have been reversed; we had more members in 2008 than in the previous year. Our student society hosts widely-attended and compelling events, and has been held up as a model to other societies by the IEEE leadership. Many of our chapters are extremely vibrant and growing, hosting a range of activities for local members. Indeed, our 2009 ISIT will be organized in part by our Seoul chapter, a relatively new chapter that received our 2007 chapter of the year award for its many activities.

Despite these strengths, there are a number of areas where we could do better, and these are the focus of several proposed changes and new initiatives, which I now describe:

Society Structure and Committee Oversight: Our society governance has changed over the last few years. In the past, most decisions and oversight was conducted by the BoG, so that the society hierarchy was relatively flat. Recently some of decisions and oversight have shifted to committees. For example, conference organizers work closely with the conference committee on conference proposals, budgets, and BoG approval, whereas much of this work was previously done directly in the BoG meetings. As the society transitions to this committee-based structure, the officers felt that the conference committee chair should become a voting BoG member given the importance of this committee to the society (similar in importance to the Publications Committee). *This requires BoG approval and a vote will be called in the meeting.*

In addition, a formal mechanism for officer oversight of committee operations was important. We are therefore proposing that one or more officers be made ex-officio members of all committees where not already in place. Currently the president, 1st VP, and 2nd VP serve as ex-officio members of the Publications committee, Shannon Award Committee, and Wyner Award Committee; the 1st and 2nd VPs serve as ex-officio members of the Paper Awards Committees (chaired by 1st VP), and the 2nd VP serves as an ex-officio member and chair of the membership and chapters committee. Below is the proposed new ex-officio membership for the other committees. *BoG approval is required for committees listed in the bylaws – currently only the Conference Committee – and a vote will be called in the meeting.* Input and suggestions for all the ex-officio memberships are most welcome.

- Conference Committee: President and 1st VP
- Online Committee: President and 1st VP
- Student Committee: 2nd VP
- Outreach Committee: 2nd VP

Reducing Transactions Sub-to-Pub Time: While our Transactions are highly prestigious, the time from submission to publication (sub-to-pub) is much longer than that of many IEEE journals. The IEEE has recently made reducing the sub-to-pub time for all its journals a top priority, and thus it is important that we take some action to do so for our own journal before it is forced upon us. While the nature of our papers may require a longer review time than that of other journals, it does not justify 6-12 months (or more) to complete a first review round, as many of our paper authors experience. There are many reasons for these long delays, as was artfully and comprehensively articulated by our EIC Ezio Biglieri and Comsoc's Director of Journals Larry Greenstein in our December 2008 newsletter. While we have limited power to address some of these issues, there are certainly many concrete steps which can be taken to improve our Transactions sub-to-pub time without compromising quality. I plan to work closely with the Transactions EiC to implement as many of these steps as possible to improve our publication timeliness. Later in this meeting will be the Publication Committee Report and the report by the ad-hoc Pareja Upgrade Committee. Both these reports will make recommendations for addressing this challenging issue.

Expanded Charter for Membership/Chapters Committee: Another important initiative for this year is an expanded charter for the membership and chapters committee, including a new distinguished lecturer program and efforts to promote more participation from and activities in countries currently lacking a large presence in information theory. Proposals for student school support will also be processed by this committee. More details will be provided in the Membership/Chapters Committee report.

Society Awards: This year we have solicited outside nominations for the Shannon Award for the first time. I believe the solicitation was a success, with six nominations received including several names that have not been considered before to my knowledge. The committee will also generate nominations internally as in the past. The deadline for the Wyner award was announced in the BOG announce list as March 1, 2009, in the newsletter as March 15, 2008, and in the bylaws as April 15. We will consider the nominations up through April 15 due to this confusion.

For paper awards, there is a new process being followed for the joint Comsoc/IT paper award, and the window for publication has been extended from one to three years. We are also not following our bylaws on generating nominations for the IT paper award. More details on paper awards will be provided in the Awards Committee Report.

Website Launch and Standing Committee Status for Online Committee: Our new website was launched in February. It is very cool and receiving upwards of 200 hits per day. It has many new features that can add much value to our discussions and information dissemination. More details will be provided in the Online Committee Report, as well as a proposal that this committee become a standing one. The online committee consisting of Matthieu Block, Jean-Francois Chamberland, Amin Mobasher, Stefan Moser, Mehul Motani, Anand Sarwate, Adriaan

J. van Wijngaarden and, most especially, the committee chair Nick Laneman deserves our deepest gratitude for their tremendous effort in vastly improving our society's online presence.

Outreach Committee: We recently initiated an outreach committee to address issues specifically affecting our women and minority members. While many see our society as welcoming and inclusive, we still have only 6% women members, and very few minorities. Until recently these members were poorly represented on the BoG, on our technical program committees, and in leadership roles in the society. We also have a weak record of nominating these members for IEEE Fellow and other distinctions. I fully support the goals of the outreach committee, and hope that in this respect we can serve as a role model to other societies within the IEEE.

Tutorial Material/Magazine Proposal: We are also debating ways to provide more tutorial material to our members, possibly through postings on our website and/or an on-line magazine. This topic will be discussed in subsequent BoG meetings.