2020 ICAPS Council Meeting

October 26, 2020, 16:00-23:00 UTC, Remotely via Zoom

Attendees:

Council Members:

Laura Barbalescu, J. Benton, Minh Do, Alan Fern, Jeremy Frank, Patrik Haslum, Malte Helmert, Erez Karpas, Daniele Magazzeni, Eva Onaindia, Gabriele Röger, Wheeler Ruml, Scott Sanner, Shirin Sohrabi, Matthijs Spaan,

Non-Council Attendees:

Susanne Biundo, Robert P. Goldman, Michael Katz, Hankz Zhuo (representing ICAPS 21)

Only for agenda item 3:

Sara Bernardini, Sarah Keren, Sheila McIlraith, Christian Muise, Marlyse Reeves, Jonathan Schaeffer, Nathan Sturtevant,

Only for agenda item 4:

Chris Beck, Olivier Buffet, Jörg Hoffmann for ICAPS 2020

1. Opening/Formalities

1.1 Review and approve minutes of the Summer 2020 Council Meeting

Approved.

1.2 Election of new officers

Gabriele Röger (President-Elect),
Eva Onaindia (Secretary),
J. Benton (Conference Liaison),
Erez Karpas (Competition Liaison)

1.3 Thanking departing members

Minh Do, Wheeler Ruml, Malte Helmert

2 Governance

2.1 ICAPS 2019 Report and Update

Presented by J. Benton.

2. Governance

2.1 ICAPS 2019 Report and Update (presented by J.)

J. analyzed the conference surveys of the past years regarding the reviewing model and happines with the reviewing quality:

- the SPC model gets more support than the leading reviewer model.

- Participants are generally happy with the reviewing quality but there nevertheless has been a significant increase in 2019 (maybe because of switching back to the SPC model).

Jeremy adds that in the surveys there were mixed opinions on short papers.

The participant list, NSF grant for students and some details on the budget are still missing from the report and will be added before approval (via email).

The council discusses that it would be good to unify the surveys a bit and be more selective with certain kind of questions, so that we can track them over time. We might also want to track visa problems. The conference liaison and 2020/2021 organizers should discuss what we should ask. Since we don't have much registration data this year, we should ask for affiliation/country and career stage. It also would be helpful to collect data on gender.

2.2 Treasurer's Report

The state of the treasury is good. Payments for gather, easy chair,... will still come in.

D&O insurance: Mercer did not answer whether international officers would be protected. Jeremy will further ask around. Thanks to Jeremy from the council for looking into this!

In case ICAPS 2021 won't be physical it could make sense to raise less sponsorship money because the costs for the conference are lower.

We can spend money on other activities of the community such as cross-fertilization activities or planning.domains.

3. ICAPS 2022

The ICAPS 2021 team leaves for this agenda item. The ICAPS 2022 proposal team presents the current state of their plans:

- Planning options: In-person, hybrid or virtual conference
- If we want to be sure to get the Banff center, it might be necessary to commit to 100k US$ deposit (about 10k to ensure the option until June 21, 2021).

ICAPS 20 organizers: Hybrid conference would be lots of work. In the preconference survey, participants clearly preferred physical conferences.

Malte: We have significantly higher registration numbers this year and environmental reasons also speak in favor of remote participation.

Sheila: hybrid can also lead to a two-tier conference, where senior people with funding can attend in person and there would be a second world in parallel for everyone else. It might be better to have a asynchronous variant, with recorded talks.

J.: read a lot about concepts of hybrid conferences. Negative feedback mostly for the reason Sheila mentioned. Some organizers added an opportunity for in-person participants to interact with remote participants.

Nathan: do we want to commit to the Banff center? How many persons/how many US dollars?

If we plan for too few participants, we can probably get large enough conference rooms but there might be too few hotel rooms available in the Banff center itself. There are some hotels within 15 minutes walking distance but it is a touristy area and they are often fully booked.

Alan: We should be expecting to grow, planning for 300 participants.

Jonathan Schaeffer: there is a force majour clause that may allow us to get out of the contract a few months before the conference, but we don't know the exact wording.

ICAPS Inc. can sign the contracts with Banff center.

Matthijs: Can we separate the contracts for hotel rooms and conference facilities?

Malte: we should aim at the lower end with respect to guarantees for hotel rooms.
Jonathan: the contract says 60 or 65% participants in Banff center hotel rooms.

Erez: if we wait two weeks, we can add an question to this year's survey.

The council is in favor of committing now for ~250 participants and risking the first 10-15k deposit. The organizers should explore the option of a hybrid conference, maybe getting another chair for this aspect on board.

Jonathan: They will need at least two weeks to get the contract ready, understand the force major clause, etc., so they don't need an immediate answer.

The council still needs a full conference proposal.

Proposal to 1. award ICAPS 22 to the team and 2. persuing a contract for ~250 participants (10-15k US$ for first deposit) unanimously accepted.

4. ICAPS 2020

Erez presents on ICAPS 2020:
- Acceptance rate over all tracks: 31.9%
- No special track was rejected but some were merged.
- Only 7 of 17 journal track submissions accepted because program was too packed
- Doctoral consortium: everyone got accepted, 3 dropped out
- Every talk repeated twice, every talk at reasonable time for speaker.
- -7k balance
- Jörg: Mixed experiences with workshop program. Good attendance, too many different channels, rooms.

Robert Goldman: he did not know about the material for conference organizers.
Gabi: it has just been moved to a git repository, Michael Katz already added some material he got from the ICAPS 2020 organizers.

Break 18:17-18:45 UTC.

5. ICAPS 2021

Hankz presents the plans for ICAPS 2021.

Open questions, also due to uncertain overall situation:
- Physical, hybrid or online?
- Guangzhou or Shenzhen (convention center or hotel)?

Michael presents the plans for the program.

Robert presents options for new publishers.

Hankz presents the plans for the competition.

Discussion:

The conference organizers plan to drop the journal presentation track for a "papers from sister-conferences" track where papers from other conferences get summarized.

This leads to some discussion in the council: the idea of the journal track was to get in work from other communities and to also allow journal-first publication. It is problematic to change this on short notice because authors might currently plan for this.

It could be an option to move from self-submission to nominations by AIJ/JAIR as other conferences do. (If the journals would agree.)

Another idea is to also cover journal articles in the new track but there are concerns that this is a sufficient replacement because it would allow much fewer time for the papers.

Not everyone likes the redundancy of the journal presentation track and some would prefer to have move time for current research.

J: this year only 7 of 11 submissions got accepted due to time constraints in the schedule.
In 2019 6 of 6 were accepted.

It is not necessary to include anything for the journal track in the proceedings, the option to have a short abstract included was mostly there for the authors to get conference travel approved. In 2020 there is nothing in the proceedings.

For Minh it is just like any other track and should be at the discretion of the conference organizers. The council agrees in principle but for larger changes (like the removal of a well-established track), it should be informed and the council's advise should be considered. Isn't it possible to find an agreement?

The topic will be brought up in the community meeting to seek the opinion of the community.

Erez suggests to move the next ICAPS to October 2021, which also allows to have the submission deadline after the IJCAI notification.

Several members of the council express concerns that they expect many people not being able to travel to China next summer. Mostly due to the Covid situation but for US-based participants, the relationship between China and the US could also be problematic.

For one of the venue options, there would have to be five invited talks. Shirin suggests that the authors could try to count the workshop invited talks toward this number.

There is some discussion regarding virtual/hybrid/physical:
- hybrid conferences will become more relevant in the future, independent of the Covid situation;
- organizing a hybrid conference is harder than just smashing a virtual and a physical conference;
- it might save the team a lot of headache and effort to decide early for a fully virtual conference;
- the advantage of being physically at a conference is that one is divided from every day duties;
- if ICAPS 21 is hybrid it is to expect that most physical attendees are from China and have not attended ICAPS before, and most international participants will participate remotely. This is unsatisfactory, giving the aim to connect to the Chinese community.
- It is unclear whether moving the conference a few months will make a significant difference.
- This year's infrastructure could be re-used in 2021.
- We should avoid a major financial commitment. If the conference is moved online, the budget is much smaller (must have significantly lower registration rates), so we cannot cover some 40k deposit.
- The decision also affects sponsorship money.
- One option would be planning now for a virtual conference and switching in Spring if the situation significantly improved. But it also should not make much difference compared to planning for a hybrid conference without making financial commitments.
- Hankz thinks a hybrid conference is possible. We can now make the announcement that it is possible to give remote talks.
- The council agrees that it is important to make an announcement in the community meeting that it will be possible to participate (have a paper in the conference) without physical presence. Since remote participation and remote presentation are different, we could now be careful what we promise. The final decision wrt. hybrid/fully virtual does not need to be taken now.
- For Hankz postponing ICAPS to October is an option. The organizers would prefer to have at least some physical components in China.
- If we move the conference date, we also should reconsider the submission deadline. Having it later would allow the submission of rejected IJCAI papers. The submission dates have already been announced so it would be good to keep them stable. Still, some people might not find it very problematic if the deadline moved a little later.
- Overall, we should not add more uncertainty.
- Alternative suggestion: find new main organizers for a purely virtual event this year and have ICAPS 23 in China?
  - In 2023, we would be closer to the conference we originally intended.
  - Would separate the conference organizers and the program chairs?
  - Hankz, Qiang and Mingh would still be willing to organize ICAPS in 2023. That's not granted because things move quickly.
  - An advantage of going fully virtual is that we could then move to October and get a few more months to resolve the publisher question.
  - Replacing the conference committee seems like a bad idea to some council members.

- Minh and Hankz would be fine with a physical conference in October, even if there would probably be many researchers from China and much fewer from other countries.
- The question is whether it is worthwhile to organize ICAPS in China if we expect only low international attendance.
- Minh has discussed this with Hankz before. Is meeting at some place and listening to remote presentation for Chinese attendees any better than a virtual conference? Hankz thinks yes and he expects some paper submitted from China.
- The council has awarded ICAPS 21 to Hankz and his team and they have the mandate the organize the conference. We can offer the option to host instead ICAPS 23 in China.
- Susanne: The council's decision was to have ICAPS 21 organized by the current team and it should now be up to the team how they handle this difficult situation. She suggests to plan for June and if it turns out that even a hybrid conference would be hard to have in June, it could then be postponed to October.
- Robert Goldman mostly agrees except for the fact that we don't have a publisher.
- Wheeler: if Hankz and Minh decide for ICAPS 21 in China, how do we decide for number of participants, etc. At some point the council will be asked to sign off a contract and he is a little nervous about these open questions.
- Minh would currently not want to commit to be a conference chair for an ICAPS 2023 in China.

Decision: ICAPS 21 will be organized by the original team with a hybrid event in mind and the option to move fully virtual. This is in line with the previous decision, so no vote is necessary.

Financial commitments should be pushed as much as possible in the future.

As the conference liasion, J. he will continue to work with the conference organizers and bring up everything relevant to the mailing list.

According to Hankz, the council can expect the information to discuss the exact venue in December.

The conference timeline is the decision of the chairs. If it is moved from June to October this should be announced at lastest in February.

J. makes a motion to form a committee to look into virtual/hybrid with J. as the lead, he recruiting the committee from the council members and one member of the 2021 team.
→ Accepted unanimously.

6 Discussion items

6.1. new ICAPS website/infrastructure

Gabi: the central website has been relaunched (suggestions welcome!). The internal parts for the council and conference organizers have been transformed into git repositories. Florian Pommerening currently moves the websites of the individual years from Sven's server to servers of the university of Basel (Sven does no longer want to host them). All websites get ssl connection and he also fixes a number of broken links. Sven continues to manage the domain.

6.2. publisher discussion

AAAI press seems no longer to be keen on publishing our proceedings and they have been extremely unresponsive (we just did not get a response). The contract can usually only be canceled with half a year notice in advance (before June). They changed the conditions which would require a new contract. In correspondence with Malte, Mike Hamilton told him that he will send it but it never happened.

Robert had a look into different options:
- ConfDNA (not really a publisher, preparing the proceedings for AAAI press).
- EasyChair
- AI access (JAIR)
- Dagstuhl
- ACM
- CEUR-WS

Discussion:
- With the retirement of Mike Hamilton, AAAI started a committee (lead by Steve Smith) to explore alternatives. So far there has not been a result. It would be good to now what happens there, so staying with them for one or two more years might be helpful.
- IJCAI has been handling their publishing very well.
- ConfDNA can provide DOIs, charging extra for this.
- AIAccess has never published anything and talks in future tense about the past on their website.
- Easychair has a nice solution for virtual conferences but much more expensive than Zoom. They can be very pushy.
- An advantage of Dagstuhl is that they are very likely to stay existent. They host the papers on their own website which looks quite web 1.0.
- It would be nice to keep the style but it also is not a too big deal to change it.
- Has Arxiv be considered in the list of candidates? It is unclear whether they provide what we need. Arxiv is not just a service provider but also a moderator. They have their own rules what can get uploaded. However, ICLR has successfully published with Arxiv, so it must be possible somehow.
- KR was published by ConfDNA. There seems to be a stylesheet mistake because KR papers show IJCAI copyright.
- Credible options are Easychair, Dagstuhl and ConfDNA.
- Malte had a very good impression of ConfDNA.
- Maybe we can talk to the organizers of KR 2020.
- Robert plans to get more information from Dagstuhl and ConfDNA. He would like to bring someone from the council in.
- The council is open to trying out another publisher.
- We need to find out how dropping AAAI press would affect our relationship with AAAI (maybe also talk to KR).

Malte suggests to form a committees:
- investigate alternatives, prices, the work involved on our side, the timeline
- come up with a concrete proposal or two alternatives to vote on.

Rob: everyone add columns to the spreadsheet: <withheld in public version>

Since this is a long-term decision, it would make sense to involve someone from ICAPS 2022.
→ Agreement.

Vote: Do we want to form a committee? → Approved.

Scott would volunteer but with a very strong opinion towards continuity (→ ConfDNA).

The council decided to have Rob Goldman on the committee, Scott Sanner as a representative of the council and that they will invite one of the ICAPS 2022 organizers (Sheila would be great because of her connection to KR).

6.3. virtual/hybrid conferences

The council postpones the decision and waits for the suggestions of the new committee.

7. Wrap-Up

7.1 Community meeting preparation

Dan: are there any topic that they want to have discussed in the open discussion.
→ nothing not mentioned earlier.

Shirin asks how the community meeting will work technically.
→ Jörg will stream all recordings, Dan will check back with him regarding the rest.

7.2 ICAPS Council Meeting 2021

The next meeting will be on the day before the ICAPS main conference starts.
→ Approved.

7.3 Any other business

Parting words by Malte.