Information Theory Student Committee
Summary of ISIT'05 and Allerton'05 Meetings

The student committee of the Information Theory (IT) society is a new committee whose goal is to help make the society of more value to students. The society's Board of Governor's (BoG) established the committee with the recognition that students will become the future members and leaders of the society, and it is therefore crucial that they play an active role. The committee is currently chaired by Andrea Goldsmith, and once established it will be run by students with a small advisory committee of regular IT society members. The committee will also have a representative attend the society's Board of Governor's meetings.

The inaugural meeting of the Information Theory Student Committee was held Monday, Sept. 5, at ISIT in Adelaide. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce students to the committee, its goals and its actions-to-date; to introduce the students and regular members that had been involved in launching the committee; to solicit feedback for event planning on what would be of most interest to students; to provide a Q&A session for students with members of the society's Board of Governors; and to open the floor to questions and discussion on any topic of interest or concern to students..

The committee has created both a website (itsoc-students.ece.cornell.edu) and a mailing list (itsoc-students-l@lists.cornell.edu). Anyone (whether an IT student member or not) can join the committee by signing up for the committee mailing list. The website will be developed with a focus on providing resources to students, including discussion groups on various topics in information theory; taped lectures and panels (including the annual ISIT Shannon lecture); pointers to information theory books, tutorials, and lecture notes/slides; links to research groups working in information theory and local IEEE information theory chapters; how-to guides on topics like getting started on information theory research, writing journal papers, and job hunting; job listings and resume postings; dissertation postings; a list of upcoming conferences with information theory sessions; and a list of upcoming events planned by the committee. A questionnaire is also posted on the website to solicit feedback from students on what events and resources the committee should focus on. The committee needs volunteers to help with all aspects of the committee, especially website development and event planning. A list of current volunteers and volunteer opportunities is posted on the website.

The open forum and BOG question-and-answer session at the ISIT meeting was lively and dynamic (it was not taped, but in the future such events will be taped and posted to the website for students unable to attend the event). The BOG members gave their perspective on the society as well as advice to students. The board sent a strong message that the student committee was created to increase the value of the society to students and to help establish a community of students working in information theory, regardless of whether these students are members of the society or not. Many board members expressed how valuable the society was to them, and how they had established lifetime collaborations, connections, and friendships through the society. We hope that the student committee can establish a similar dynamic for its members.

The committee also held a meeting at the Allerton Conference on Thursday, Sept. 29, after dinner. There was a brief presentation about the student committee, followed by a panel session entitled "Information Theory: What's Hot, What's Not, What's Changed" moderated by Andrea Goldsmith. The goal of the panel was to give students some perspective on the current state of information theory research as well as a historical perspective on how the nature of research in this area has changed over the years. The panelists - Abbas El Gamal, P. R. Kumar, Sanjoy Mitter, Tara Javidi, Massimo Franceschetti, and Jacob Ziv – provided an entertaining and insightful mix of advice, perspective, and wisdom. The panel session was taped and can be downloaded from the student website.

One initiative that students should be aware of is a website currently being developed by UCSD with tutorial background on key areas of information theory. The website will consist of multiple pages, each describing a particular topic. Topics will be described at a high level, with links to deeper tutorial material on specific subtopics. The target audience is beginning graduate students or researchers from other fields. The goal is to let beginning researchers know what's known, and interest them in learning more. The pages may also include links to books, papers, tutorials, etc. Open problems will also be posted, as well as success stories about the impact of information theory on practical system designs. The website will be linked to the student committee website as soon as it comes online.