2023 ICAPS Council Meeting

July 8, 2023, 10:30- 18:00 CEST, hybrid format: in-person attendance and remotely via Zoom

Attendees:

Council Members (in person):
Laura Barbulescu, Roman Bartak (from 10:30 to 12:45), J. Benton, Jeremy Frank, Erez Karpas, Michael Katz, Gabriele Röger, Shirin Sohrabi, Mauro Vallati

Council Members (remotely):
Eva Onaindia, Pradeep Varakantham, Hankz Hankui Zhuo

Absent Members:
Matthijs Spaan, William Yeoh

Non-Council Attendees:
Only for agenda item 5 (representing ICAPS 2025) 13:45 CEST: Nir Lipovetzky

Only for agenda item 7 and item 8 (representing ICAPS 2024) 15:30 CEST: Christian Muise (in-person), Sheila McIlraith (remotely), Sara Bernardini (remotely), Nathan Sturtevant (remotely)

Only for agenda item 8 (representing ICAPS 2024 Summer School) 16:05 CEST: Jane Jean Kiam (in-person), Pascal Bercher (in-person), Sarah Keren (remotely)

1. Opening/Formalities

1.1 Review and approve minutes of the ICAPS 2022 Council Meeting
Approved.

1.2 Election of new officers
Congratulations to the new officers:
- Shirin Sohrabi for continuing her role as Inclusion chair.
- William Yeoh for taking over the role of Treasurer.

1.3 Welcoming new members
Congratulations to the new elected members: Roman Bartak and Mauro Vallati

1.4 Thanking departing members
Thanks to Laura Barbulescu and Jeremy Frank for their strong involvement in the ICAPS community. Thanks to Jeremy for his service as Treasurer of the Council.

2. Governance

2.1 ICAPS 2022 Report and Update (presented by Pradeep Varakantham)

Pradeep analyzed the figures from the reviewing process:

1. Acceptance rate: Main track (29.07%), Industry & Applications (35.29%), Planning & Learning (31.25%), Human-Aware Planning & Scheduling (34.78%), **TOTAL: 30.69%**
2. Acceptance rate: Journal (90.91%), Doctoral Consortium (100%), System Demonstrations (86.33%)
3. Program:
    a. Program organized around three time-zones: Asia-Europe, Europe-America, America-Asia
    b. Two parallel tracks, poster session
    c. Demos presented twice in designated poster/demo sessions
    d. Panels: Career Development, Competition, Industry
    e. Special care to social program: Get-Together, Speed Gathering, Puzzle Game Challenge, Games

Pradeep analyzed the statistics on registrations:

1. Paid registrations: 310, Free registrations: 72
2. Gender distribution (approximately): Male (75%), Female (20%), Non-binary, (0.5%), Prefer not to answer (4.5%)
3. Important points on Budget (approximate numbers):
    a. Budget balance: 7,520€
    b. An increase in sponsorships received
    c. An increase in Slidesive cost because of gather.town (two tracks, more paper, longer talks)
    d. Publication cost decreased
    e. Registration revenue decreased

Slides and guidelines to be passed on to the next organizers.

2.2 Treasurer's Report (presented by Jeremy Frank)

1. Ending balance by 2022: 297,177.94 USD
2. ICAPS finances are in good health: we can devote money to more scholarships, more money for registrations.
3. ICAPS 2024 expenses will be higher: 20,000 USD as deposit for 2024 and other expenses will come along
4. Directors & Officers (D&O) insurance:
    a. Coverage effective June 16th, 2023 ($1M, renewal in 1 year), separate limits for D&O and EPLI (Employment Practices Liability Insurance)

b. Protection is against legal actions taken in US (the insurance does not apply outside US)

c. The insurance is to protect the 300K in the account

5. Taxes:

a. Work with tax prepares and the new treasurer

b. Two versions of the taxes: open to the sponsors and public disclosure, or private to the Council

2.3 Report on CORE submission (presented by Gabriele Röger)

A discussion on the ICAPS submission document for the CORE ranking presented by Erez and Gabi on May 2023 is initiated:

- It is not clear whether ICAPS meets all the requirements to maintain the ranking A*
- Discussion on why the CORE ranking is so important:
  o It is very important for European and Australian universities
  o We should try to maintain the ranking otherwise we could witness a flow to other conferences such as AAAI and IJCAI
  o There is a general sense that we must consider rankings for stronger visibility. We wonder if not being included in the rankings could potentially jeopardize sponsorship.
  o We all concur with the good-quality reviewing of ICAPS compared to other major AI conferences. Our strategy should be maintaining our quality standards.
  o During the discussion, other issues came up as to whether co-locating is a good strategy and the relevance of the role of the advisory chair. Enforcing someone from the Council to take over the role of advisor makes not much sense.

Conclusion:

- Make ICAPS organizers aware of the considerations of the CORE ranking and let them do what they consider most appropriate. Let organizers take the ranking considerations as a guideline and not as a policy.

3. ICAPS 2023 (presented by Mauro Vallati and Roman Bartak)

ICAPS 2023 presentation (Mauro):

1. Four tracks (Main, Industry and Applications, Robotics and Learning) with dedicated PC (possibly overlapping) and review forms.
2. SPC model: SPC (22), PC members (Main: 115, Industry: 62, Robotics: 18, Learning: 46)
3. A total of 258 submissions: a decrease of 7% with respect to ICAPS 2022

4. Acceptance rate (31%) as in ICAPS 2022: (Main: 35%, Learning: 27%, Applications: 22%, Robotics: 18%)
    a. Robotics: reviewers complained about non-good-quality papers
    b. Applications: papers do not always fit the track (not applications)
    c. Position papers: very few submissions and all rejected, are they worth it?
5. Overall Program:
    a. DC on 8th July
    b. 9th and 10th July: 6 Tutorials and 11 Workshops
    c. 11th to 13th July:
        i. Main conference: 21 sessions in two parallel sessions
        ii. 3 invited speakers (1 ICAPS, 2 from other communities)
        iii. Demos in parallel with posters
        iv. One 'welcome to ICAPS' session (also used to promote the visibility of diversity)
6. Comments:
    a. Problems due to the emails not reaching recipients (maybe email address is not updated in EasyChair)
    b. Concerns about the number of experts that did not accept the invitation to be part of the PC:
        i. 34 declined directly, 50 let the invite expire and never joined for the Main track
        ii. Overall, 87 declines and 131 expires.
        iii. It is becoming complicated to find reviewers.
        iv. Many researchers declined to be part of the PC due to having too much-reviewing workload. Should we worry about declines in future conferences?
    c. We initiate a discussion on the **passed-on negative experiences** with certain PC members:
        i. The information passed on by previous organizers works well and it helps increase the quality of the PC list.
        ii. Shall we make this info public? AAAI worries about legal issues. We talked about not making it public but making it public that it exists.
        iii. Design procedures to update the info of reviewers identified as negative experience. The objective is to identify researchers that systematically submit late reviews.
    d. Discussion on the convenience of the **rebuttal**:
        i. It requires a significant effort from authors and reviewers.
        ii. It is only helpful in a limited number of cases. In most of the papers, the outcome is already clear.
        iii. Rebuttal shapes the discussion on the paper.
        iv. Comments on various options: 1) stress that rebuttal is optional; 2) let reviewers decide if rebuttal is needed or not and in case it is, ask for it.
    e. A side note on the submissions to ICAPS:

i. We note that ICAPS is one of the very few conferences that did not register an increase in the number of submissions (unlike some conferences such as KR). This must be observed in the next conference.

Conclusion:
- Emphasize in the guidelines to be passed on to the next organizers the issues with reviewers declining to be part of the PC.
- Point out in the guidelines our discussion on the passed-on negative experience with reviewers as well as on the rebuttal.

Conference management (Roman):

1. Registrations:
   1.1. Physical participation (278), Online participation (31).
   1.2. Regular fees (59%), Student fees (41%)
   1.3. 29 complimentary registrations (students, invited speakers, …)
   1.4. Participation by region: North America (25%), South America (1%), Asia (12%), Australia (5%), Europe (52%), no answer (5%)
   1.5. Participation by gender: Male (76%), Female (16%), non-binary (1%), No answer (7%). Female/male ratio = 1/4.75.
2. Online registration:
   2.1. Similar prices for online participation as last year (hybrid conferences are expensive to run).
   2.2. Online fee (no paper presentation) is for people who really want to participate.
   2.3. Not fully online this year, it includes streaming of workshops and conference sessions.
3. Student support:
   3.1. Mainly for students presenting a paper.
   3.2. US-based students (16), NSF support: 14,700 USD (expenses reimbursement)
   3.3. Non-US-based students (19), AIJ support: 7,000 EUR (complimentary registrations)
4. Budget:
   4.1. To this day, July 8th, only the numbers of registrations are available. Figures are not very precise at this point but they look good.
   4.2. Comments on the good health of finances; keep in the account a little bit more than needed to run a conference and use the rest for support; maybe run support from the Council separately from the conference.

Break for lunch from 12:45 to 13:45. We move the scheduled discussion items after the presentation of ICAPS 2024.

4. ICAPS 2025 (presented by Nir Lipovetzky)

Nir Lipovetzky joins the meeting at 13:45 CEST.

1. Nir presents the proposed Conference Chairs (Nir Lipovetzky, Sebastian Sardina), Program Chairs (Julie Porteous, Miquel Ramirez and Daniel Harabor) and Advisory Chair (Giuseppe De Giacomo), the highlights of the bid, tourist and transportation information of Melbourne, the venue (Melbourne Connect), etc.
2. Co-location with SoCS and CPAIOR
3. Registration fees in line with past ICAPS conferences (early fee for regular participation 750 USD; early fee for student participation 488 USD).
4. No remote participation
5. Most part of the discussion was centered around the dates to hold ICAPS 2025. Two options are presented along with the pros and cons:
   a. Conference option 1: Nov 30th 2025-December 5th 2025
      i. November is a non-teaching period in Australia.
      ii. Better weather conditions, daylight up to 9.30pm.
      iii. Submission (May 1, 2025) happens in a period with no other alternatives for planning venues.
      iv. Gives the opportunity to resubmit to AAAI (mid July).
      v. **Disadvantage**: 69.2% replies to the Scheduling of ICAPS survey prefer ICAPS to be held in the usual timing from April to September
   b. Conference option 2: June 22nd 2025-June 27th 2025
      i. No changes with recent ICAPS, preferred option by the ICAPS community
      ii. **Disadvantage**: June-July is the thick of winter, low temperatures (10º-12º C)
      iii. **Disadvantage**: examination at University.
      iv. **Disadvantage**: Submission would be around mid February 2025 and most Chairs will not be available prior submission date (late December-late January) as this is the summer school holidays period.

The proposers made clear their preferred option was Conference option 1 and that they were not willing to run the review process during Christmas and January, as it is the summer holiday period in the southern hemisphere.

Based on the answers to the survey 'Scheduling of ICAPS', the Council claims that Conference option 2 is the preferred option by almost 70% of the planning community and that November and December are among the months highly marked as impossible attendance.

Nir Lipovetzky leaves the meeting, and we open up a discussion on the dates. The members of the Council show concern about the submission date of Conference option 1 and the impact of the dates of other AI conferences in the ICAPS submissions. Also, we discuss how the dates of Conference option 1 would affect the submission and review timeline of the subsequent ICAPS. Finally, a vote with three options is taken:

A. Follow Conference option 1
B. Follow Conference option 2

C. Keep submission dates in the usual timing and conference dates as in option 1 (Nov-Dec 2025)

The outvoted option is B and then option C.

Nir Lipovetzky enters the meeting again at 15:10.

Conclusion:

The Council decided to approve Melbourne to host ICAPS 2025. Nir Lipovetzky is also informed about the results of the 'Scheduling of ICAPS' survey, the result of the vote by the Council, and that the decision about the definite date is left up to the organizers provided that the submission and reviewing follow roughly the usual timeline (not moved to May). The Council encourages to bring up this issue at the community meeting as well. Nir Lipovetzky will discuss all this with the rest of the team.

Break from 15:15 to 15:30.

5. ICAPS 2024 (presented by Christian Muise)

Nathan Sturtevant, Sheila McIlraith Sara Bernardini and Jonathan Schaeffer join the meeting remotely at 15:30 CEST.

1. Dates (tentative):
   a. Abstracts due: December 7, 2023
   b. Papers due: December 13, 2023
   c. Rebuttal: January 16-31, 2024
   d. Conference: June 1-6, 2024
2. A preliminary budget based on 283 attendees (ICAPS 2019) is presented. Fees range from 480 USD (early student) to 900 USD (late regular).
3. The organizers propose to change to OpenReview rather than EasyChair. They requested feedback to analyze the pros and cons. The tentative plan for Open Review includes:
   a. Discussion eventually opened upon author approval
   b. Discussion period open for back-and-forth (2 weeks long)
   c. Only SPC or Program Chairs can bench reject based on 'suitability'.

A discussion is initiated on the use OpenReview and the plan to use it. The Council members show concerns on the 'back-and-forth' period and having people engaged in the discussion for two weeks. No strong benefits are regarded.

Discussion on other issues regarding the expectations for recording/streaming the conference sessions (keynotes, tutorials, talks …).

6. ICAPS 2024 Summer School (Budget) (presented by Jane Jean Kiam)

Jane Jean Kiam and Pascal Bercher join the meeting in person at 16:07 CEST. Sarah Keren joins remotely.

Jean Jane presents the budget, estimated expenses and incomes (for 40 students). BIRS sponsorship is confirmed (only for food and beverages) provided that the Summer School takes place at the Banff Centre. AIJ sponsorship application is due 15th July. There are also other sponsorships pending. ICAPS account can handle it if the other sponsorships do not reply.

The proposers present the urgent decision: the need of ICAPS Council to commit to two deposits:

1) 10,000 CAD for a signing deposit
2) 20,055 CAD for the 50% of the remaining anticipated master account revenue

The two deposits will not stress the budget.

Other issues that were discussed:

1) Proposers expect at least 40 attendees; financial costs would be covered with 40 people. Questions as to whether 40 people is enough came up.
2) The Summer School is on task motion planning and it is dedicated to planning people, who don't need to understand or know about robotics. Mostly robotics simulations and simulated environments will be used. This raises the question of how many people will the Summer School attract to the planning community. Some Council members feel the topic of the Summer School is too narrow. Proposers reply that the idea is about integration task motion planning related to planning heuristics, model-based planning, etc.

Jane Jean and Pascal leave the room and Sarah Keren leaves the zoom. They join again shortly after the Council deliberation.

Conclusion:
The Council decided to sign off on the two deposits.

The Council recommends the proposers:

1) Not to advertise the Summer School as task motion planning but as a Planning Summer School with an orientation towards task motion planning. The objective is to catch a broader audience.
2) Stress diversity in the selection of participants.

7. Discussion items

7.1 Scheduling of ICAPS (Survey)

Gabi presents the results of the survey.

To the question 'In which month could you attend ICAPS more easily?', the top preferred replies are the months of June and July. Months from October to April are not attractive to the attendees.

We conclude to keep the conference in June.

7.2 Airlift Challenge competition (Michael)

We discuss the proposal for the Airlift Challenge Competition proposed by the Air Force Research Lab, the simulator that will be used to score the AI agents, the evaluation scenarios, etc.

We think it is a good opportunity to show the potential of planning over Machine Learning. We request though that organizers make publicly available the criteria used for the competition, scoring method, baseline algorithms and results. We conclude that we will ask the organizers if they are willing to make everything publicly available.

7.3 Open TODOs in guidelines for organizers (Erez Karpas)

Erez presents the document 'ICAPS – Guidelines for Conference Organizers'-.

We discuss explicitly mentioning diversity in the guidelines so that organizers have this aspect in mind when organizing the conference. Some members of the Council think there should be a minimum list of things to consider for organizers and that the Council should enforce the list. Others are more in favor of giving organizers flexibility and setting few constraints on them but specifying what must be done.

It is important that every conference has at least two advocates and the ICAPS Diversity & Inclusion Chair. This is important for people to know who to speak to address. To mention the need of collecting data as well.

Regarding the paragraph in which the initial expenses are mentioned, we decided to replace "small surplus ... " with "breaks even" as well as to add afterward the phrase "Generating a larger surplus should be avoided".

7.4 Conflict of Interest (CoI) guidelines

Discussion on various issues:

1) The guidelines do not mention the use of generative AI

2) Do we want to enforce CoIs if people don't know which papers have been sent by who?
3) Acquire information of CoIs
4) A CoI will be referred to either the chairs of the current ICAPS conference or the ICAPS Executive Council if a chair is part of the CoI.
5) The CoI policy will not apply to workshops, tutorials, IPCs, demos.
6) Authors can flag CoIs with reviewers but these need to be justified. The decision whether it is acceptable is done by the chairs.
7) Update Code of Conduct if necessary.

Some fixes on the document 'ICAPS Conflict of Interest Policy' are done.

8. Wrap-up

8.1 Community meeting preparation

Community meeting preparation in charge of Gabi and J.

8.2 ICAPS Council Meeting 2024

The next Council meeting will be on the day of the Doctoral Consortium at ICAPS 2024.

8.3 Any other business

No remarks.