

REFLECTION ON THE PAST TWO YEARS

It has been two unusual years for ComSoc: first the pandemic, and then some significant changes in the managerial ranks of the staff.

Pertaining to the staff, we had a new Executive Director (ED) essentially since the beginning of 2020. The Society also had to hire four new directors: Conferences, Members and Global Activities, Technical and Educational Activities (2020), and this past month, Publications. In addition, we hired a Governance Specialist, a Membership Manager, and a Senior Conference Planner. Harold Tepper, the ED, did a great job identifying candidates, and in the short amount of time working with the first three new directors confirmed that we have significantly improved the quality of our service and generation of new ideas on operations and services. I am optimistic that ComSoc, under Harold's leadership, will enjoy great efficiency in operations and first-rate services for years to come.

Adapting to the pandemic was not easy. Particularly on the conference front, transitioning to virtual and later hybrid was new and unexplored ground. Amidst the chaos, a few volunteers and staff took matters into their own hands and led us to a set of user-friendly and cost-effective solutions. Notably, the staff Director of Conferences, Kristine Chin, the CIO, Zhi Ding, and the Business Technology Manager, Natasha Simonovski spent long hours early on crafting solutions and wading through many options. Harold also managed to get some last-minute (as in next-day) contracts approved by IEEE Legal and Contracts. In retrospect, the solutions seem obvious but it was quite dicey for a month or two. Kudos to those who performed beyond expectations and in some cases even outside their purview.

For 2020 and 2021, we had planned on pursuing in full force the ComSoc Strategic Plan as approved by the BoG. The three main thrusts were:

1. Strengthen the society's efforts on all layers of the network and also on networking issues concerning computing and applications.
2. Re-engage industry.
3. Promote diversity in gender, geographic extent, and discipline.

I had the chance to assess how much upper network layer research is going on with our constituents at ComSoc over the last two years by attending just about all the Technical Committee (TC), and Emerging Technology and Industry Community committee meetings. I was not surprised that there were quite a bit of upper layer activities going on but not nearly as much as physical layer activities. Moreover, many efforts were fragmented into different committees with little or no communications among them. Most are focused deeply on some narrow areas of research, but much fewer activities are on entire end-to-end systems. Most of the research presented in our journals and conferences are from academics, and they tend to go deep into a confined area of research. In recent years, industry seemed to have taken a step back in their contributions to our conferences and publications. Re-engaging industry will revive a lot of big system activities and go a long way to remediate that shortfall. This year, we appointed a holistic network ad hoc study group chaired by Alberto Leon-Garcia and Martha Steenstrup to address how we can make progress on a broad network front that includes touching on computing and applications. The result of that study and plan for future pursuit is captured in the President's Page of August 2021. Investment in nurturing this area will have to continue to correct the shortfall.

We asked all the TCs, publications, and conferences to increase their industry activities. The results have been mixed. We are specifically asking the TCs and conference committees to have industry representation and member services to increase industry-targeted services. To bring



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an industry perspective to the Society, this year Ed Tiedemann and I started an industry advisory group with a dozen members who are CTOs and SVPs and VPs of engineering of major communications and network companies. They came up with many suggestions. Some of these suggestions we already knew but have not executed well. Others are new to us, and hopefully the different sectors of the Society will take their advice to heart and work hard to re-engage the industry.

We have passed legislations in our Bylaws that all nominations by the Nomination Committee and appointment of Directors and Standing Chairs of the BoG must have a written report on their effort to seek diverse candidates. We also requested that all lower-level appointments follow such practice. In some cases that policy was followed, but not so in others. The BoG has yet to learn fully how to perform due diligence in nominations and appointments. In this administration, there has been a jump of appointed Directors and Chairs from two to nine (of thirty). This is a good start, but this achievement is the result of an intense recruiting effort. We should be happy that there were a lot of women candidates for MALs and VPs. One VP and two MALs were successfully elected this year. On the other hand, we know our diversity effort is not nearly finished, what with all the candidates actively recruited into running. To that end, I appointed an ad hoc committee on diversity chaired by Maite Brandt-Pearce to explore what additional avenues we can pursue and how to enforce our diversity legislation. We can only breathe a sigh of relief when there are enough candidates in the pipeline and we do not have to actively recruit at all!

Related to diversity, but not exclusively, is our two efforts to pass legislation setting term limits for elected BoG members. Regrettably that failed BoG votes repeatedly. Proponents of no term limits strongly felt experience counts in nominations and appointments. Although enough experience to qualify for the job is important and should be one of the criteria, taking the experience metric to its extreme prevents elevation of new blood and refreshing of ideas on how to run the Society. Surely, new ideas and diversity of all sorts also should count as important metrics. We also tried to pass a rule that past Presidents cannot run for office, and that failed too! It is incredulous that a past President would cycle through again the ranks of the BoG!

On the governance front, I appointed an ad hoc committee to deal with misconduct other than publications chaired by Maite. This is to echo a similar committee recently established by IEEE. This committee will serve as one of the avenues through which ComSoc can file complaints (in addition to directly filing with IEEE). With an internal committee familiar with the culture and operations of ComSoc, hopefully there will be less viscosity and better understanding of complaints to facilitate resolutions. In the past, some of these tasks were relegated to the Ombudsman. However, the Ombudsman's mission is to mediate disputes and provide possible directions for resolution. He/she should refrain from passing judgment on conflicts but try to provide a sensible pathway for mediation. There seems to be confusion for some volunteers as to the definition of what constitute conflicts of interest and "rightful compensation" due a volunteer. The IEEE is a 501c3 nonprofit organization, and there are rules on volunteer "compensation." The Governance Committee must be more proactive in evangelizing these rules in the future.

All and all, it was a challenging two years with the pandemic. We overcame a lot of obstacles and coped with the situation well thanks to some volunteers (in many cases from unexpected corners) that stood up to the challenge. However, many of our objectives still have been left unfinished. It is up to the next Board to see if they feel strongly about these objectives to continue working on them or not.