

Conference Options – Some Possibilities

These are some thoughts intended to be helpful in thinking about our options for the 2020 conference. They are not recommendations resulting from a deliberative process. Rather they are intended to inform discussion about what we could do, and what deliberative process we should go through to figure out the details.

Business as Usual

This is the in person conference we have come to know and love. Attendance, including author attendance, is likely to be smaller, probably 60-80% of normal so it would be a conference of 270 to 360 people. This would doubtless be a wonderful experience for those of us who did attend. The program would be adjusted the same way we have always adjusted programs, but with the expectation of a higher than normal withdrawal rate.

Business as Usual in November

We could simply postpone everything until November. Without reopening the submission process, this simply means we would have the same conference later. There would be withdrawals not only because people could not attend, but likely because people have different things they want to do with their work, though the flexible conference record would not preclude people from presenting material that is much further along the publication pipeline.

The alternative of reopening the submission process could be considered.

A Hybrid Conference

A hybrid conference would include a physical gathering with distance participation. We need to make sure that there are opportunities to present work either remotely or directly as well as ways to see the work being presented. We also need to support meetings (somewhat easier) and make sure that the event is worthwhile for sponsors.

Plenary Sessions

Plenary sessions have the advantage of being strongly focused on presentation. This make it easy to broadcast them live, allows for questions from remote viewers via a local person reading them out, and can easily be recorded for later viewing. Even if the live remote feed broke, much of the value in the sessions would still be available in the recordings. The presenters would be physically present for these, so that technical breakdowns would not stop the presentations. They would be timed to allow decent participation from many geographies, which would probably mean somewhat fewer of them.

Parallel Sessions

Parallel sessions would consist of both local and remote presenters, with the session chair controlling the screen sharing between a local computer and that of the remote presenters. All parallel sessions

would, as a consequence, need AV so that the remote speaker could be heard. The session Chair would also be responsible for relaying remote questions entered through chat, and repeating local questions so that remote viewers and speakers can follow the conversation. The sessions would be recorded, though it is likely that not all would deserve it.

Timing of these might be a headache since remote presenters would need to be awake to present. Alternatively, these could be split into in person presentations, and truly virtual sessions as discussed in the Virtual Conference Option below – and scheduled after the close of the physical conference. This would degrade content integrity, but the tradeoff in simplifying the scheduling might be worth it.

Poster Sessions

Run a regular poster session, but also include a poster page (including the in person posters) with discussion capability as described in the virtual conference.

Work in Progress Sessions

The same as parallel.

Meetings

Schedule these either in person with remote connection ability, or completely offline before/after the conference. These we have experience with – it is not all good, but it works. Someone does need to manage the remote connection portion.

Workshops

For truly interactive workshops these really need to be done in person. Adding in remote connections seems likely to be highly confusing. For lecture style presentations hybrid (or completely remote) would work well. We could present workshops as is, or ask workshop presenters to prepare their material for remote presentation and do a hybrid with recording.

Sponsors

In addition to the regular opportunities there could be lead in recognition on recorded material.

Feedback, Modeling Assistance Workshop...

These would probably best follow the fully remote option.

Conference Record

Same as fully remote, this would include the traditional record and, available for 6 months, access to all recorded session for registrants at the conference or remotely. After that, anything especially good could be kept as a member benefit.

Colloquium

This is really the purview of the Student Chapter, but it could follow the protocol for Plenary and Poster as above.

A Virtual Conference

There would be no physical gathering. People would concentrate in time, but not in space. The time frame for the conference would extend beyond the single week, but keep some of the cadence of the physical conference for the main program. All sessions would be live and (except Poster) recorded for later viewing.

Plenary Sessions

Plenary sessions would be presented in 60-120 minutes slots, one per day. The times could be adjusted based on the time zones the speakers are in. This would go on for up to 10 days (two working weeks) and set the structure for the conference. Most activities, except perhaps meetings, would occur between the firsts and last of this set of plenaries. These would include an opening and closing ceremony as well as awards. Presentations would follow the 20/10 format with discussion facilitated by a session chair reading off questions for the speakers. A session facilitator would handle the screen hand off between presenters. The sessions would be recorded.

Parallel Sessions

Parallel sessions would be scheduled at other times than the plenaries, and based on the time zones of the presenters. These would be 1 hour meetings following the 15/5 format we are used to and use the same basic protocol as the plenary. Assuming the session chairs are tech savvy they could manage the handoff between presenters. Reading off questions for speakers is still sensible, though for smaller sessions the session chair could select to have people ask their questions directly.

Since the times would be varied, we would probably only need a few parallels running simultaneously. It is likely many would need to reference recordings to see the sessions given time zones.

Poster Sessions

We could organize posters into a sequence of web pages. There may be software that would support something like presenters signing in to show they are available for chat, having those posters highlight, and then allowing viewers to connect with them. Alternatively, we could do away with poster sessions and follow something more like the work in progress format. If anyone felt nervous about presenting the session chair could help.

This seems like a real challenge.

Work in Progress Sessions

The same as parallel.

Meetings

Meetings at the conference have the advantage of everyone being in one place at the same time. None of that applies for a virtual conference. Meeting could be scheduled around the time of the conference, or perhaps later in the year would make as much sense. The conference time might present a nice opportunity to get more than the ordinary overlap for meetings.

Workshops

These would probably need to become a little bit more like webinars. The in-person experience of people helping each other out, or having facilitators lend a hand, seems hard to replicate remotely. You could certainly still ask participants to go hands on, but there would be little way to know if they did. There could still be good discussions. In addition, the sessions could be recorded so more people could go through them later.

Sponsors

Lead in and lead outs from sessions and possibly some specified chat times where there would effectively be a room to talk to people from the different sponsors.

Feedback, Modeling Assistance Workshop...

Feedback sessions would become more like tutorials – this is the way that I do my feedback sessions in any case. They would probably feel a little odder than they currently do. The modeling assistance workshop would become more like the mentoring activity that is ongoing.

Conference Record

This would include the traditional record - titles, abstracts, and extended abstracts/papers/slide presentation. There would also be records of the sessions available to conference registrants only. That archive should probably be available for only 6 months or so. After that, anything especially good could be kept as a member benefit, but much of the conference is probably better to let fade.

Colloquium

Posters might get dropped in favor of a plenary format. The sessions could occur on the first day of the conference – right after the opening plenary, or occur ahead. This is something that needs to be discussed with the Student Chapter.

New and Different Things

We have tried hackathon style activities but they don't work well in the context of a short conference. With the time extended and the intensity lessened having some challenges laid out at the beginning and then a contest on insights in the problems delivered toward the end (or over the weekend in between) might be fun. I am sure there are other things that could be done that would be unique to a virtual format.