



Association for the
Advancement of Artificial Intelligence

2020 AAAI Executive Council Candidate Statements

The AAAI Nominating Committee (consisting of Subbarao Kambhampati (Chair), Eugene Freuder, Claire Monteleoni, Cynthia Rudin, and Matthijs Spaan) has prepared a slate of two (2) candidates for the position of AAAI President-Elect and eight (8) candidates for Executive Councilor. The term of President-Elect is two years. The President-Elect automatically becomes President after the expiration of the current President's term. The President then holds the Past President position for the next two years. Councilors serve a three-year term of office.

Please vote for no more than one (1) person for the position of President-Elect, and four (4) people for the position of Councilor. Write-in votes are allowed. Each candidate was asked "What is the most pressing issue facing AI and AAAI today?" Responses appear in the paragraphs labeled "Statement." Please read this information before voting at the AAAI Membership URL sent to you via email.

President-Elect Candidates (2)

- Francesca Rossi
- Qiang Yang

Executive Councilor Candidates (8)

- Edith Elkind
- Susan L. Epstein
- Christopher Geib
- Laura Hiatt
- Martin Michalowski
- Barry O'Sullivan
- Balaraman Ravindran
- Kartik Talamadupula

President-Elect Candidates (2)

Francesca Rossi

Francesca Rossi is an IBM fellow and the IBM AI Ethics Global Leader at the T.J. Watson IBM Research Lab. Before joining IBM, she was a professor of computer science at the University of Padova, Italy. Her AI research interests focus on preferences, multi-agent systems, computational social choice, constraint reasoning, fairness, and value alignment. Overall, she has published over 200 scientific articles on these topics. She is a fellow of both AAAI and EurAI. She received the 2019 IJCAI Donald E. Walker and the 2010 ACP (Association for Constraint Programming) distinguished service awards. She has been president of IJCAI and ACP, an executive councilor of AAAI, the Editor in Chief of the Journal of AI Research, the program chair of CP 2003 and IJCAI 2013, and the general chair of AAAI 2020. She has leading roles in many AI ethics centers and global initiatives, such as the Future of Life Institute, the IEEE AI ethics initiative, the Partnership on AI, the AI for Good ITU summit, and the European Commission High Level Expert Group on AI.

Statement

Science and technology have never been so present and impactful in our life. During the current pandemic, in which I hope you are all safe and healthy, they support our isolated present and they will define the new normal going forward. Innovative AI research will drive a major portion of this new reality. However, advancements in AI should go hand in hand with careful considerations about the global impact of their deployment in everyday life. The AAAI ecosystem can and should play a crucial role in this process.

To advance AI capabilities, all AI sub-disciplines, none excluded, are needed. AAAI traditionally covers all areas of AI and thus it is the ideal environment to support and facilitate integrated AI research, and should increasingly be considered the leading, broadest, most inclusive, and most inspiring publication venue for high-quality AI research. With its global membership -- and by leveraging recently begun companion conferences such as the one on AI, Ethics, and Society (AIES), that I contributed to found -- AAAI should also be recognized as the global leader in addressing the legitimate ethical concerns associated with the massive deployment of AI in our life. I plan to exploit my experience in several AI research areas, my European background and current US affiliation, and my participation in several multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder global initiatives on AI ethics, to increase AAAI's global leadership in AI, AI strategy and governance, and AI ethics.

AI research is no longer an academia-only endeavor. Major efforts are present in most corporate environments, and there is an increasing urgency around having these two worlds cooperate in the most effective way. AAAI should be the place where they meet and co-create beneficial innovation, in a structured and healthy way. To this aim, I plan to leverage the knowledge of both research environments that I acquired in my 20+ years in academia and 5 years at IBM Research.

The role and format of large scientific conferences, and the sustainability and quality of their peer review system, is being impacted by the rapid growth of the field, and now also by the constraints imposed by the pandemic. AAAI should lead a coordinated AI community-wide effort that to define what future AI conferences should look like. My experience as IJCAI president, AAAI councilor, JAIR editor in chief, as well as IJCAI 2013 and AAAI 2020 program chair, gives me a deep knowledge of the AI research environment and of its main convening and publication venues, that I plan to use to help AAAI successfully lead this effort.

Women and other underrepresented minorities in AI need more opportunities and visibility, both at the AAAI conference and in other AAAI initiatives. At AAAI 2020, I started a comprehensive D&I program that I hope can be expanded in the future.

Qiang Yang

Qiang Yang, a fellow of AAAI, ACM, IEEE, IAPR, CAAI and AAAS, is a chair professor and former head of the CSE Department at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST). His research interests are AI (machine learning, case-based reasoning and planning) and KDD (Google Scholar H-index = 100+). He received his PhD from the University of Maryland, College Park in 1989 and had been a faculty member at the University of Waterloo (1989-1995) and Simon Fraser University (1995-2001) before HKUST. He was the founding Editor in Chief of the ACM Transactions on Intelligent Systems and Technology (ACM TIST) and IEEE Transactions on Big Data. He was the Program or Conference (Co) Chair for ACM KDD 2010, IJCAI 2015, ACM KDD 2012, ACM RecSys 2013, IUI 2009, ICCBR 2001 and AAAI 2021. He received the ACM SIGKDD Distinguished Service Award (2017). He served as the President of IJCAI (2017-2019) and on the IJCAI's Trustee (2013- present), and has been a councillor of AAAI and International Committee Chair (2016-2019). He is the current President of AI and Robotics Society of Hong Kong. He is also the Chief AI Officer at WeBank.

Statement

As AI enters a new era of rapid expansion with increasing impact on our society, it also experiences great challenges. The ethical and responsible use of AI is now high on the public agenda. AI conferences are overwhelmed with submissions while the reviewing capacity is being seriously overstretched. With COVID-19, online conferences are increasingly becoming a norm rather than an exception. These and many other new challenges leave the AAAI community with a serious question: can AAAI rise to the challenge and lead?

My answer is yes, with a solid leadership. I have been involved in many leadership positions in my academic and industrial career across US, Canada, Hong Kong and Mainland China. With this rich international working background that cuts across cultures, regions and AI subfields, I intend to make AAAI more central in its role as a leader and connector.

With the stellar effort by the current and the previous AAAI leadership, AAAI has gained its reputation as being the one place where AI researchers, students and the public to gather and learn about advances in AI. It is important to build on this success and continue to expand AAAI's impact by reaching out to more communities and build connections with specialized conferences and with general conferences such as IJCAI, ECAI and PRICAI. It is important to balance gender and cultural backgrounds of the leadership team.

In the era of virtual meetings and growing submissions, it is important to build new capabilities to maintain the quality of the AAAI conference and publications. It is worthwhile to explore new AI tools to fight fraud while respecting ethics and privacy. It is important to build international and cross-conference coalitions in such endeavours.

Crises can be a challenge and an opportunity for leadership. I feel privileged to have the opportunity to meet these challenges and take AAAI to the next level.

Executive Councilor Candidates (8)

Edith Elkind

Edith Elkind is a Professor of Computer Science at the University of Oxford. She received her PhD from Princeton in 2005. Prior to joining Oxford, she held postdoctoral positions in the UK and Israel and faculty positions in the UK and Singapore. Her research areas are algorithmic game theory and computational social choice. Her work has been supported by National Research Foundation (Singapore) and by an ERC Starting Grant. She served as an associate editor of Journal of AI Research, AI Journal, Journal of Autonomous Agents and Multiagent Systems, ACM Transactions on Economics and Computation, and Social Choice and Welfare. She was a program chair of AAMAS'15 and ACM EC'18, as well as a general chair of AAMAS'19, and will be the program chair of IJCAI'23.

Statement

An important challenge we are facing as a community is to make AI accessible to broad segments of population, from students to researchers in other disciplines to policy-makers. AAAI can play an important role in coordinating our efforts and identifying what works best, by running workshops and mentoring activities for those who would like to participate in such outreach activities. Another issue I am interested in is how to maintain the high quality of the refereeing process of the AAAI conference, and in particular how to train the new generation of researchers to provide helpful reviews.

Susan L. Epstein

Susan Epstein is a Professor of Computer Science at Hunter College and The Graduate Center of The City University of New York (CUNY). She received mathematics degrees from Smith College and New York University's Courant Institute, and her Ph.D. in computer science from Rutgers. She develops knowledge representations and learning algorithms to support the development of expertise. An interdisciplinary scholar, she has worked with and published for mathematicians, psychologists, geographers, linguists, microbiologists, and roboticists, to identify important principles about knowledge and learning and to help computers exploit those ideas. She has served as a symposium co-chair and Senior Program Committee member for AAAI, chair of The Cognitive Science Society, Secretary-Treasurer of ACM's SIGAI, and on the editorial board of AI Matters. She has received awards for her research and her mentorship, and pioneered computational cognitive science in the undergraduate curriculum. Her current focus is on spatial cognition and cognitive robotics. She has published more than 150 papers in leading journals and conferences.

Statement

Unless people value and trust AI, we limit both our ability to support society and society's willingness to fund our work. Two significant challenges arise from this premise: explainability and education. An understanding of how people perceive, decide, and learn in a similar context simplifies and informs natural language explanations of algorithmic decisions. Therefore, as neurology and psychology rapidly progress, we should educate and update AI practitioners on those results. Such education will enable us to address representational and cognitive differences, and to build programs that communicate more effectively about their reasoning, their plans, and their confidence in their own computations. At the same time, AAAI should support outreach to the general public to increase understanding of, interest in, and enthusiasm for our work. This is particularly important on the undergraduate level, because today's students are tomorrow's influencers.

Christopher Geib

Christopher Geib is a Principle Researcher at SIFT LLC. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania in 1995 followed by a post doctoral fellowship at the University of British Columbia. After this, he spent nine years as a Principal Research Scientist at Honeywell Inc., seven years as a Research Fellow in the School of Informatics at the University of Edinburgh, and four years as an Associate Professor at Drexel University in the College of Computing and Informatics. In 2017, he joined SIFT where he has continued his work on AI plan recognition and planning for a variety of application areas including: user interfaces for complex systems, humanoid robot interaction, computer network security, and others. Since 2005, he has been a Co-Chair and organizer of the Plan Activity and Intent (PAIR) workshop series and its forerunner Modeling Others from Observations (MOO). Since 2015 has Chaired the AAAI Symposium Series.

Statement

I see two major opportunities for AAI. First, AAI is uniquely situated to help develop more international, "work in progress" research meetings. Like the existing AAI Symposia Series, Dagstuhl seminars, and Shonan Meetings, such meetings set academic standards and provide invaluable opportunities for junior and senior researchers alike to meet, share their developing research ideas, and gain valuable insights from each other. More such meetings are needed in more parts of the world. By taking a leadership role, AAI can help to create such meetings and establish their immediate research legitimacy. Second, and related, the recent challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic have shown that new technologies can provide us with tools to increase dissemination, accessibility and even interactivity within our community. We need to continually explore ways in which we can use new technology to aid in amplifying and supporting the ever more distributed work and researchers in AI.

Laura Hiatt

Laura Hiatt is a research scientist at the US Naval Research Laboratory, where she leads the Adaptive Systems Section. She earned her B.S. in Symbolic Systems from Stanford University (2004), and M.S. and Ph.D. from Carnegie Mellon University (2007 and 2009, respectively). From 2018-2019, she was appointed to the DoD's Joint AI Center (JAIC), where she led JAIC's AI delivery efforts. She is also a Courtesy Faculty member at Oregon State University. Her research primarily focuses on ways in which humans and robots can effectively work together as teammates, involving issues of planning and execution, cognitive science, and team-based task coordination strategies. She has served as a PC and SPC member for many AI and AI-related conferences, including AAI, IJCAI and ICAPS, and has served as Area Chair for AAI multiple times. She also is currently serving as finance chair for the ACM/IEEE Human-Robot Interaction conference, after just completing two years chairing the AAI Doctoral Consortium.

Statement

It's an exciting time to be in AI, with advances occurring both in terms of fundamental AI research as well as applying AI to real-world problems. The community as a whole, however, could and should do a better job at delineating between those two types of contributions. There are several important impacts that would result from this type of delineation. First, it will help to adjust the expectations of AI from those who are not themselves AI practitioners, facilitating the understanding that not all reported AI contributions are ready for real-world consumption and decreasing hype. Second, it will help to ameliorate some of the current concerns about the large AI research conferences, especially given current increases in submissions. By better defining the scope of submission tracks focusing on fundamental AI research vs. the application of existing AI techniques to new or benchmark problems, it will clarify to both authors and reviewers which papers are good matches to which tracks, reducing mismatches in contribution expectations. Finally, making this distinction would help encourage the training of a holistic AI workforce that differentiates between skill sets that lend themselves towards AI research vs. AI engineering/applications. This, potentially, could help to slow the concerning drain of academics to industry.

Martin Michalowski

After completing his Ph.D. in Computer Science (2008) at the University of Southern California, Martin Michalowski worked in the private sector as a Senior Principal Research Scientist at Adventium Labs. He moved to academia in 2017 and is an Assistant Professor in the School of Nursing and a member of the Nursing Informatics Group at the University of Minnesota. Martin holds academic appointments at the University of Ottawa (Canada) as adjunct professor in the School of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science and as Senior Researcher in the Mobile Emergency Triage (MET) Research Group. He is also the Director of Machine Learning Research at Treatment.com and the Technology Lead at Andamio Games. Dr. Michalowski has been a member of AAAI for 17 years and was elected AAAI Senior Member in 2018. His active involvement in AAAI started in graduate school with the creation of several networking events for students including a student reception and “lunch with a fellow” (AAAI-06 conference). These two events have been core activities at all AAAI conferences since then. Martin has organized eight AAAI conference workshops and one AAAI Fall Symposium that focus on applying AI to healthcare, most recently at AAAI-20 in New York City. He is chair of the 2020 International Conference on Artificial Intelligence in Medicine (AIME), a pioneering AI in medicine conference to be held for the first time in North America in 2020. He served as editor for special issues of the Nature Partner Journal (npj) - Digital Health, AI in Medicine (AIIM), and IEEE Biomedical and Health Informatics journals. He has published over 60 refereed journal and conference papers on AI topics ranging from automated reasoning, machine learning, planning, to K-12 education. Martin has received funding from the NSF, NIH, DARPA, DoD, and various private foundations.

Statement

AI has been transformative for many public and private industries, and we are currently observing an AI-led revolution in healthcare. I am a firm believer that AAAI should spearhead this life-changing transformation. As evidenced by the number of presentations and events at recent major AI conferences, interest in using AI to improve quality of care and patient outcomes has been growing exponentially. Even though AI applications in healthcare date back to the late 1970s, current technological advances in robotics and computing and the right social climate have created ideal conditions to take full advantage of what AI can contribute to improving the provision of care. Yet healthcare constitutes a complex system that presents many challenges to AI's adoption. Ethics, the ability to explain and justify models' results, education of patients and providers, inherent biases, and social equity are some of the non-technical issues that need to be addressed for AI solutions to be integrated into care delivery. I believe AAAI is uniquely positioned to provide leadership to the rapidly growing field of AI applications in healthcare, and this leadership is crucial for the ethical and evidence-based uptake of AI models and algorithms by patients and providers. If elected, I will build on already existing AAAI initiatives (i.e., ethics, education, outreach committees) in order to position our society as a key player in creating a sustainable healthcare system. As the current pandemic has demonstrated, research leveraging AI accelerates healthcare innovation and saves lives.

Barry O'Sullivan

Barry O'Sullivan holds the Chair in Constraint Programming at University College Cork in Ireland. He is the Founding Director of the Insight Centre for Data Analytics at UCC, Director of the Science Foundation Ireland's Centre for Research Training in AI, and was previously the Director of the Cork Constraint Computation Centre. He is an Adjunct Professor at Monash University, Australia. Professor O'Sullivan is Vice Chair of the European Commission's High-Level Expert Group on AI and a scientific advisor to AI Watch, an initiative of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre tasked with monitoring the uptake of AI and related policy initiatives in Europe. He is also active in a number of Track II diplomacy efforts in relation to the application of AI in complex geopolitical settings. His research work is focused on artificial intelligence, constraint programming, operations research, and ethical issues related to AI and data. He has a keen interest in the commercialisation of AI and is involved in a number of startup companies. Professor O'Sullivan is a Fellow and current President of the European AI Association (term ending in 2020), Fellow of the Irish Academy of Engineering, Fellow of the Irish Computer Society, and a Member of the Royal Irish Academy. He was formerly the President of the Association for Constraint Programming and received the ACP's Distinguished Service Award for his contributions there. He is co-founding editor of the Springer book series "Artificial Intelligence: Foundations, Theory, and Algorithms".

Statement

Over the past number of years AAAI has expanded its horizons to become a truly international AI association. Its conferences and events are attracting greater numbers of international participants than ever. At the same time, the field has attracted enormous attention across academia, industry, and the public at large. Across the world there are major scientific and policy-making initiatives aimed at promoting and facilitating the needs of the community in areas such as network building, achieving research critical mass, and ensuring that major investment is made in AI. As a world-leading learned society with a heritage based on technical excellence and scholarly enquiry, AAAI has a critical role to play in the development, promotion, and accurate communication, of artificial intelligence. As a long-standing participant and contributor to AAAI, it would be an honour to have an opportunity to bring my experience and expertise to help AAAI in its internationalisation efforts, as well as its engagement efforts with policy-makers, to advocate for greater investment in AI research, in AI education, in innovation, in the enhancement of diversity in our community, and in building of global partnerships.

Balaraman Ravindran

Balaraman Ravindran is the head of the Robert Bosch Centre for Data Science and Artificial Intelligence (RBC-DSAI) at IIT Madras, the Mindtree Faculty Fellow and a professor in the Department of Computer Science and Engineering. He is also the co-director of the Pratap Subrahmanyam Centre for Digital Intelligence, Secure Hardware and Architectures (PSC-DISHA) at IIT Madras. He has held visiting positions at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, India

and University of Technology, Sydney, Australia. He has published extensively in journals and conferences, including all the premier AI/ML venues. He has been on the (senior) program committees of several premier conferences and is currently serving on the editorial boards of JAIR, PLOS One and Frontiers in Big Data. He has co-organised several workshops at ECML-PKDD, NetSci, ICML, and IJCAI, as well as the Data Science in India meeting along with the ACM SIGKDD conference since 2015. He was elected as Senior Member of AAAI in 2020.

He has played a key role in organising the Indian Data Science and AI community and advises the Indian government on several initiatives related to AI. He is one of the founding executive committee members of the India chapter of ACM SIGKDD and is currently serving as the president of the chapter. He was instrumental in starting and organising the series of Conference on Data Science (CoDS) and the subsequent joint conferences on Data Science and Management of Data (CoDS-COMAD). This has now become the leading platform for the data science community in India with a good mix of industry and academic participation. He currently chairs the steering committee for the conference.

He is a popular educator giving many public lectures on AI. His video lectures on reinforcement learning are widely viewed and have received accolades for their depth and delivery. He received his PhD from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and his Master's in research degree from Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. He has nearly two decades of research experience in machine learning and specifically reinforcement learning. Currently, his research interests are centred on learning from and through interactions and span the areas of social network analysis and reinforcement learning.

Statement

Artificial Intelligence is beginning to affect many aspects of our everyday life. As a reflection of that, there is a tremendous interest among the general public to know more about AI. Given the transformational nature of AI, there is also concern from policymakers and governments about the wider impact of AI. There is a rush to make policies to regulate AI. This is especially true in the post-COVID19 world, with AI poised to impact how we work, learn and socialize. I believe that AAAI as a body, and each individual AI researcher, has the duty to take control of the public AI narrative so that there is a better understanding of the power, capabilities and failings of AI among the general populace as well as decision makers.

This requires a three-pronged strategy, including (1) develop more accessible material about AI for the general reading, as well as focused material on the power of AI in different walks of life; (2) develop AI curriculum for non-AI specialists and encourage adoption of such courses in all academic specialisations; and (3) develop guidelines for AI regulation for different applications and show the way for government bodies.

While some countries have made tremendous efforts in involving academics in the decision-making process, the same could not be said of others, especially ones where there are not too many accomplished academics. Here the role of AAAI becomes very important as a global body whose voice would carry much importance.

Kartik Talamadupula

Kartik Talamadupula is a Research Staff Member at IBM Research. He received a Ph.D. in Computer Science from Arizona State University in 2014. His research focuses on applying sequential decision-making techniques to real-world problems, and has encompassed the fields of automated planning, human-robot interaction, crowdsourcing, dialog systems, reinforcement learning, natural language processing, and knowledge graphs. He has previously chaired the IBM AI professional interest community. Kartik has organized several workshops, served on various program committees and as an SPC for both IJCAI and AAAI, and has co-chaired the ICAPS 2019 Tutorials program and the AAAI 2020 demonstrations program. He is a Program Chair of ICAPS 2021 (Applications Track).

Statement

My position is that one of the most pressing issues facing AI and AAAI today is the understanding and ownership of AI applications, and the narrative around them. At a time when the entire world is dealing with the unprecedented disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, and new challenges related to this global phenomenon emerge, AI is omnipresent in our society's collective efforts to sustain and rebound. AI methods and tools are helping with discovery, tracking, rapid response, data understanding, collaboration, logistics, moving people and processes to the virtual domain, etc. As our world is forced to constrict physically and expand digitally, AI technologies will be used in an even wider variety of settings and applications. In anticipation and support of this, I plan to devote my time on the council towards pushing for a more unified and streamlined approach to AI applications that takes into account academia, business, industry, and policymaking institutions. For AAAI as a conference, this will entail a discussion around a unified policy for application-centric contributions. The AI community must not be content merely with doing good, but must strive to also be understood to be doing good.