

Preface

The Society for Artificial Intelligence and Statistics (SAIS) is dedicated to facilitating interactions between researchers in Artificial Intelligence and Statistics. The main responsibility of the Society is organizing the biennial International Conference on Artificial Intelligence and Statistics, AISTATS. We acted as program chairs for the Twelfth meeting which took place April 16-18 2009 in Clearwater Beach, Florida. This meeting continued the tradition established in 2007 of co-location with the Learning Workshop. AISTATS 2009 and the Learning Workshop had one day of common plenary sessions, a common poster session, followed by a common banquet. In response to the ever increasing popularity of the AISTATS meetings, the SAIS Board voted in Clearwater Beach to establish a sister biennial AISTATS conference in Europe. The first European meeting is scheduled for spring or early summer 2010.

There were 210 submissions for AISTATS 2009, representing a 40 percent increase relative to the 2007 meeting. This strong participation lead to the decision to initiate the European meetings. From the 210 submissions we accepted 21 oral presentations and 63 poster presentations for an overall acceptance rate of 40 percent. To handle this larger number of papers we assembled a Senior Program Committee (otherwise known as “area chairs”) to coordinate review of submitted papers. The committee’s members were recruited from Statistics and Computer Science Departments and included:

David Blei, Princeton University
David Dunson, Duke University
Nando de Freitas, University of British Columbia
Jon McAuliffe, University of Pennsylvania
Brian Milch, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Joris Mooij, Max Planck Institute, Tuebingen
Iain Murray, University of Toronto
Rebecca Nugent, Carnegie Mellon University
Luis Ortiz, SUNY Stonybrook
Pascal Poupart, University of Waterloo
Alan Qi, Purdue University
Pradeep Ravikumar, University of California, Berkeley
Nati Srebro, University of Chicago / Toyota Technological Institute
Yee Whye Teh, Gatsby Unit, University College London
Helen Zhang, North Carolina State University

Papers were reviewed by a Program Committee, consisting of 150 experts in a wide variety of sub-disciplines within Artificial Intelligence and Statistics. Each paper was reviewed by at least three reviewers and no reviewer handled more than five papers. The initial review process was followed by a brief discussion phase among the reviewers and

overseen by the Senior Program Committee. We thank all area chairs and reviewers for their invaluable service and we apologize that some of their work had to take place over the winter holidays. For the first time, the review process used the online conference management system "Confmaster". We thank Thomas Preuss for his quick responses to our innumerable questions and requests regarding the Confmaster system. We believe that the organization of Program and Senior Program Committees along with the online system was successful in improving the quality of the review process.

The contributed program was rounded out by the presentations of three dynamic invited speakers. To increase the visibility of AISTATS among statisticians, we invited three prominent statisticians to speak at AISTATS 2009. William S. Cleveland (Purdue University) spoke on *Data Visualization: Retaining the Information in Data*, Carlos M. Carvalho (University of Chicago) spoke on *Handling Sparsity via the Horseshoe* and Mark H. Hansen (University of California, LA) provided a Banquet talk on *Words to look at, words to listen to*.

We join all of the conference participants in thanking Charles Sutton in doing a spectacular job of attracting corporate sponsors for the meetings. Generous support was provided by DE Shaw & Co., Nokia, Microsoft, Pascal, Toyota, Google, Intel, and Wirefly. Together these sponsors contributed \$26,000. This money was used to support 14 student travel awards and 2 best paper awards, to offset the costs of the conference banquet, coffee breaks, and poster-session refreshments, and to pad the coffers of the SAIS treasurer.

Finally, we would like to thank Alexander Ihler for publicizing the meeting and establishing the conference webpage, Mauricio Alvarez and Neil Lawrence for organizing the final submissions and posting them in the *Journal of Machine Learning Research* online Conference Proceeding, *JMLR* for hosting the Proceedings, Karen Smith for her invaluable contribution to the organization of this meeting in terms of local planning, the SIAS treasurer, Daryl Pregibon, for keeping the books for the meeting, William Cohen for establishing the online registration payment system used by conference participants, and of course the authors of the 210 papers submitted to AISTATS 2009!

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