

**USNC-URSI**  
**Executive Council Meeting Minutes**  
9 January 2021  
Online Meeting



**1) Call to Order and Introductions (Sembiam Rengarajan)**

Sembiam Rengarajan, the Chair of USNC-URSI, called the meeting to order at 10:04 am MST. The following Members of USNC were present at the Executive Council Meeting:

*USNC-URSI Officers*

Sembiam Rengarajan (Chair)  
Michael Newkirk (Secretary and Chair-Elect)  
David Jackson (Immediate Past Chair)  
Gary Brown (Accounts Manager)

*Commission Chairs (or Vice Chairs/Secretaries)*

Jeanne Quimby (Commission A Chair)  
Branislav Notaros (Commission B Chair)  
Eric Mokole (Commission C Chair)  
Negar Ehsan (Commission D Chair)  
Larry Cohen (Commission E Chair)  
Kamal Sarabandi (Commission F Chair)  
Attila Komjathy (Commission G Chair)  
Mark Golkowski (Commission H Chair)  
Jeff Mangum (Commission J Chair)  
Alyson Ford (Commission J Vice-Chair)  
Majid Manteghi (Commission K Chair)

*Women in Radio Science Chair*

Reyhaneh Baktur

*U. S. Officers of URSI*

Ross Stone (Assistant Secretary General - Publications)

*Society Representatives*

David DeBoer (AAS)

*National Academies Staff (non-voting)*

Ana Ferreras

*Student Paper Competition Coordinator (non-voting)*

Erdem Topsakal

The Chair recognized the attendance of Jamesina Simpson, who was elected at the 4 January 2021 USNC-URSI Business Meeting to be the next USNC-URSI Secretary. Jamesina has been appointed to the USNC-URSI Executive Committee for 2021, in order to begin participating in USNC-URSI administrative functions given that that current officers' terms have been extended by one year and the next term will be only two years.

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The Chair also announced that during the past week, Ashley Vanderley agreed to join the USNC-URSI Committee as the NSF Representative. In addition, Branislav Notaros has replaced Jamesina Simpson as Commission B Chair and Mark Golkowski has replaced Robb Moore as Commission H Chair for 2021. They will both continue in these positions through 2023.

## 2) Approval of the Agenda (Rengarajan)

The updated agenda for the meeting was discussed and approved (M: Quimby; S: Brown).

## 3) Approval of the Minutes (Rengarajan)

The minutes of the July 2020 Executive Council Meeting were approved (M: Quimby; S: Stone).

## 4) Comments from Commissions about the 2021 NRSM (Rengarajan)

- Sembiam showed final 2021 NRSM data that shows the number of submitted papers was 236, with 229 accepted and 10 withdrawn. The total number of sessions was 40, with 20 being Special Sessions. 218 of the 219 videos were uploaded; there was one that did not receive government approval for public release in time for the live session. However, since the Whova site will remain online through the end of January, that video will be uploaded when approval is obtained so that session participants can review the presentation.
- The 2021 NRSM Registration data were reviewed. The total number of registrants was 361, with 96 students and 100 attendee-only, 13 Early Career with paper fee, 57 non-members with paper fee, and 95 members with paper fee.
- Branislav Notaros noted that he received very positive feedback from others on how the conference was conducted, and expressed appreciation to the organizers for an excellent interactive meeting.
- Commissions reported on the conduct of their Business meetings. Commission H noted that the virtual meeting allowed for attendance by those that might not have been able to attend in person if we had met in Boulder.
- Reyhan reported that the WIRS speaker and subsequent Q&A session were both well-attended and positive experiences for the speaker and attendees. Mike pointed out that the all of the invited speakers were very happy with the format of the presentation and Q&A sessions.
- Eric and Jeff noted that the pre-recorded presentations were very good quality and that the Q&A after the video made for a very good experience for attendees. Branislav noted that it was much easier to stay on time with this format. Jeanne suggested that we include a “best practices” document to authors to address issues with being able to read text or graphs in presentations. She noted that with pre-recorded videos there was no way to ask an author to explain a graph, so it is even more important to ensure presentations are legible.
- Feedback on the use of the coffee breaks for continued discussions was generally positive, in that they provided additional time for Q&A or just general discussion on the topic of the session. Some continued these discussions well past the end time of the session. It did not

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seem that many used the option to set up their own discussions in Whova, but it was also noted that some didn't know how to use that feature. It was suggested that additional information be included in the body of the emails that provide instructions in how to use the platform. However, the general sense was that this format allowed for a great deal of interaction between attendees, even if not within Whova itself.

- It was suggested to include all coauthors and affiliations in the agenda, not just the speaker. Sembiam suggested that in the future perhaps authors should be allowed to show their slides during the Q&A to help address questions. It was also suggested to allow attendees to access the abstracts from within Whova.

## 5) Commission Business Reports: Update on Officers and New Members (Newkirk)

- Mike reported that a vote was conducted by USNC-URSI Women in Radio Science (WIRS) Chapter to elect Zoya Popovic as Vice-Chair and Jeanne Quimby as Secretary.
- Commission B now has Branislav Notaros as Chair, Reyhan Baktur as Vice-Chair and will appoint a Secretary at a later date.
- Commission H now has Mark Golkowski as Chair, Chris Crabtree as Vice-Chair and Ashanthi Maxworth as Secretary.
- There were 13 new members elected into the Commissions since the July 2020 NARSM: eight of these are Early Career Members, two were Associate Members, and three were regular members. Commissions were encouraged to recruit for new members throughout the year, with membership information now found on the USNC-URSI Archive ([www.usnc-ursi-archive.org](http://www.usnc-ursi-archive.org)). It was noted that WIRS will have a separate membership application process, which is still being developed, and a page on WIRS will be added to the Archive. Commission Chairs were reminded that voting on new members can be done either during a Business meeting or by email vote. All new members receive a certificate from the National Academies.
- Ana noted that all Committee members will have to re-sign the Conflict of Interest forms for the National Academies, since the terms have been extended by one year. James Manning will send the forms in the coming weeks.

## 6) Commission Business Reports: Feedback from the Commissions (Newkirk)

- Mike summarized the responses to actions assigned to the Commission Business Meetings:
  1. Feedback on participation in the 2022 and 2023 Joint IEEE AP-S/USNC-URSI Meetings:
    - Commissions A-F and K will participate; G, H and J will not.
  2. Participation in the 2021 Joint IEEE AP-S ICEAA-APWC/USNC-URSI Meeting in Honolulu, HI:
    - Commissions A-C, E, F and K will participate; D, G and J will not.
    - It was noted that there are several meetings close together in this timeframe that may make it difficult to attend all.

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- There was a request that in the future, more information about meetings beside just the title be provided so that Commissions have more details to determine whether they will participate. A link to a conference web site or Call for Papers would be helpful.
  - This also generated some discussion about other conferences outside the IEEE AP-S meetings that might be considered for USNC-URSI co-sponsorship, such as AAS, AGU and IGARSS.
3. Suggestions/presenters for 2022 NRSM tutorials, workshops, or short courses:
- A substantial number of topics was provided and will be considered by the Tutorials Committee, led by Jeff Mangum.
  - It was noted that the first tutorial held earlier in the week was well-attended and only positive comments were received. A recording of this tutorial will be available on the USNC-URSI Archive, along with the Invited Speakers' presentations.
4. Comments on what should be planned for online components for the 2022 NRSM, in addition to face-to-face events:
- With regard to tutorials, there was a request to consider offering these with a fee that is separate from registration for the rest of the technical sessions. In this way, individuals could attend a tutorial without attending the rest of the meeting.
  - There were some comments about costs vs. benefits of allowing attendance in-person and online. Most preferred that the technical sessions be held in person. The Executive Committee will be investigating options for a hybrid meeting and in the summer the full Committee will be informed of the plan for the next NRSM.
  - Consensus was that tutorials and business meetings could be held in a hybrid or completely online fashion; in fact, all preferred to continue having an online option for future Business meetings regardless of the format of the rest of the NRSM.
5. Are there any volunteers to serve in the committee to search for exhibitors/sponsors in 2022?
- A few names were suggested from across the Commissions and the Executive Committee will follow up with them.
  - Kamal Sarabandi suggested that government labs should be approached since they have needs for US students from our field. Eric Mokole suggested that FFRDCs and UARCs may have more discretionary funds to support activities like this. Kamal further noted that USNC-URSI should be looking for new members from these organizations, in order to get more recognition and support from within the organizations.
6. Any suggestions for plenary topics/speakers for the 2022 NRSM?
- All but one Commission had ideas to investigate further; the complete list is provided in the meeting slides and discussed in Paragraph (9).
7. Would someone in your Commission consider staffing a virtual Commission booth this week?

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- Five of the ten Commissions held a booth on at least one afternoon. All that had a booth agreed it was worth the time, but noted that with a bit more advertisement there may have been more attendees to drop by. Commission B gained two new ECM applicants from their booth. Some Commissions used the time to catch up with colleagues or to have further discussions after a session.
- Kamal pointed out that it might be helpful to find ways for Commission members to learn more about other Commissions since so much of our research is interdisciplinary. He would like to encourage membership in more than one Commission.
- Additional feedback included three Commissions expressing general support for an effort to restore the Arecibo Observatory radio telescope.
- Attendance at the Commission and Chapter business meetings was reviewed, with good numbers for all the meetings. Of note, the WIRS meeting included 30 guests, which is an excellent indication of interest in the Chapter.
- Attendees were encouraged to provide feedback on the virtual nature of this NRSM in order to prepare for the 2022 NRSM.
- Mike proposed a late-July Executive Committee meeting in order to prepare for the 2022 NRSM. This would be held to review the status of Special Sessions, Plenary/Invited speakers, and tutorials; plans for virtual/hybrid components of the meeting (given the anticipated COVID situation for January 2022), and preparations for paper review process, including improvements to the CMS software. The attendees agreed this would be valuable. Jeff Mangum suggested we also consider assessing the carbon footprint/cost as part of the decision on how to proceed with the next NRSM.

## 7) White Paper on the Proposed Arecibo Telescope (Mangum)

- Jeff Mangum provided a summary of the discussion that was held by Zoom on Tuesday, 5 January. There were approximately 48 participants from across the community, including some that were not NRSM attendees. Some of the contributors to the white paper also participated in the meeting.
- The concept of the proposed replacement was described, which was driven primarily by the planetary radar application. It was noted that this concept was largely a draft document with no cost estimate, and was assembled rather quickly in the aftermath of the December antenna collapse. None of the attendees recommended USNC-URSI support this specific concept, as it is too preliminary.
- Other Commissions officers in attendance thought it better to offer a more general letter of support for investment in the Arecibo Observatory, but not a specific concept. It was noted that the now-defunct antenna served a vital role for a number of Commissions throughout its life, and was named after a prominent USNC-URSI member, William E. Gordon.
- Jeff also pointed out that a past senior review of NSF-supported facilities found that Arecibo was one that was directed to seek more of its funding from outside sources, as the facility's relative importance to the science community had declined. As a result, he felt that it may be premature for USNC-URSI to insert itself into the process of determining what, if anything, should be done to replace the antenna.

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- After considerable discussion, it was recommended that a general letter of support be written to the Director of the Arecibo Observatory, supporting the need to replace the antenna but not comment on the specifics that were given in the white paper.

## 8) Discussion of the Student Paper Competition (Topsakal)

- Erdem reviewed the Student Paper Competition (SPC) process that was implemented this year to determine the finalists. Based on discussions after the July 2020 SPC, one step in the process was removed; this involved Commission Chairs reading all the full papers from across the ten Commissions and ranking the authors after the reviewers had scored all papers. This step adds a significant delay in determining the finalists and some Commission Chairs felt they were not knowledgeable enough to rank other Commissions' submissions. This year Erdem simply chose the finalists based on the reviewers' scores, which saved a lot of time and effort for all involved.
- This was also the first year that five finalists were chosen to compete for the top three prizes. This was enabled by the virtual format, allowing the SPC presentations to be given the evening before the Plenary and awards session, which is when the SPC presentations have been traditionally held. This also had the indirect benefit of allowing time for a third Plenary speaker, another first for this NRSM. After some discussion, it was agreed to keep the number of finalists at five for future SPCs. In addition, it was agreed to provide some form of "URSI memorabilia" to all five finalists, regardless of their final placement. URSI ties (for men), scarves (for women) and mugs were suggested, so Erdem will decide in consultation with the Executive Committee.
- Erdem also reviewed a proposed update to the SPC rules. In the past, he has contacted students after the submission deadline to obtain the required advisor letters, but this led to significant efforts to chase down letters and delayed the start of the review process. He has proposed that additional language be added to inform the students that if they do not submit all required materials by the deadline, their papers will automatically be removed from the SPC without warning. There was no objection, so that language will be added.
- There was also some discussion on how the final judging is done by the Commission Chairs during the SPC presentations. The current practice is that each Commission simply ranks the presentations from 1 (the best) to 5. There was some discussion on adding a more quantitative assessment of the different aspects of the presentation; however, some Chairs felt that they may not be able to properly assess presentations from other Commissions. In the end, it was decided that Erdem would work with the Commission Chairs to develop an improved judging process, to include having the relevant Commission providing a summary of the innovation and other technical qualities of each paper to aid other Commissions in their assessment of any presentations from their Commission.

## 9) Plenary Session Topics and Special Sessions for NRSM 2022 (Rengarajan)

- Sembiam provided a list of past Special Session themes back to 2010 as well as ideas from the Commissions back to 2014.
- Chairs were asked to review these topics and any ideas put forward in their business meetings, then send proposals for the 2022 NRSM to Sembiam and Mike.

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- Chairs were also asked to provide final details on their special sessions, including confirmation of two organizers per session, to Mike and Sembiam by 1 May 2021.

## 10) Discussion of the Commission Websites and USNC Archive (Rengarajan)

- Commissions were again reminded to provide updates to their pages on the USNC-URSI website. Commissions C, E and K have no pages, but it was noted that Commissions C and E are currently preparing some material. Commissions were asked to contact James Manning (JManning@nas.edu) to update these pages.

## 11) Discussion of Commission Membership Lists (Newkirk)

- Each Commission is to update their membership list with any new members' information and any changes for current members, then send to Mike Newkirk.
- New members will receive a letter from the National Academies welcoming them as USNC-URSI Commission members.
- Mike noted that he will be investigating the use of Google Groups for the consolidated membership list. In addition, less contact information will be required for these lists, which should make maintaining the lists easier for the Commissions.

## 12) Other items for Discussion

- None

## 13) Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 12:59 pm MST (M: Stone; S: Newkirk).