EDITORIAL

The New Faculty Highlights Program at AAAI-21

At AAAI 2021, we introduced a "New Faculty Highlights" program. The aim was to showcase top young researchers who had taken up their first faculty or research scientist position at a research-intensive university or lab in the preceding year. Each selected participant presented a 30-min talk at the conference, summarizing their work to the broad AAAI audience.

We see many ways in which this program benefits the AAAI community. First, it deepens the conference experience for attendees. Participants are encouraged to draw on their highly polished job talks. Because job talks are designed for accessibility to broad audiences, they are ideal for helping researchers from diverse AI subfields to understand important emerging trends and simultaneously to become familiar with AI researchers leading the new generation. The longer talk format also enables speakers to describe a *body* of work rather than a single paper and to situate different elements within a coherent narrative.

Second, the program benefits the selected faculty members. It is hard to get known in a community as big as AAAI. These talks offer participants a high-profile opportunity to make their work more broadly known. We expect the program to act as an important source of recognition for such young researchers.

Finally, the program benefits students. AAAI's plenary talks tend to focus on senior researchers; New Faculty Highlights expose students to examples of exceptional work by researchers who were recently students themselves. We hope that this experience is both inspiring and helpful to students about to embark upon their own job searches.

In the first iteration of the program at AAAI 2021, 119 young researchers applied; a distinguished committee of seven AAAI fellows selected 18 of these to participate in the program. The selected speakers were a demographically diverse group (11 male and seven female; seven different countries represented). They were just as diverse in terms of their research perspectives, which spanned multi-agent systems, robotics, theoretical machine learning, information retrieval, planning, green AI, social context of language, justice for machine learning, online privacy, and more.

We are delighted that AI Magazine has invited these young stars to contribute articles. In this edition, four of the 18 are included. Lili Mou explores neural models for the generation of text using unsupervised techniques; Jundong Li studies causal effects in network data; Pascal Bercher develops theory, algorithms, and applications for two prominent planning techniques; and Hang Ma advances decision-making in multi-agent systems.

We hope that the New Faculty Highlights program becomes a permanent feature of AAAI conferences, and does its bit in celebrating early career successes and encouraging more students to pursue a career in research.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The authors declare that there is no conflict.

Kevin Leyton-Brown[1]
Mausam[2]
Qiang Yang[3]

[1]*University of British Columbia, Vancouver*
[2]*Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi*
[3]*Hong Kong University of Science and Technology*