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Conference Reports

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AI Education Matters

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Full article: http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/3544897.3544901
Call for Nominations

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Issue overview

Welcome to the first issue of this year’s AI Matters Newsletter. We open with a Conference reports by Louise Dennis. This second article is an education piece by Todd Neller describing the FairKalah Model AI Assignment. We close the issue with a call For nominations for the 2022 SIGAI Industry Award.

Submit to AI Matters!

Thanks for reading! Don’t forget to send your ideas and future submissions to AI Matters! We’re accepting articles and announcements now for the next issue. Details on the submission process are available at http://sigai.acm.org/aimatters.

Anuj Karpatne is co-editor of AI Matters. He is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Computer Science at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech). He leads the Physics-Guided Machine Learning (PGML) Lab at Virginia Tech, where he develops novel ways of integrating scientific knowledge (or physics) with machine learning methods to accelerate scientific discovery from data.

Ziyu Yao is co-editor of AI Matters. She is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Computer Science at George Mason University. Her research interests lie in natural language processing (NLP) and artificial intelligence (AI), particularly building natural language interfaces that can reliably assist humans in knowledge acquisition and task completion. She also works in NLP/AI for other disciplines such as Software Engineering and Bioinformatics.
This section is compiled from reports of recent events sponsored or run in cooperation with ACM SIGAI. In general these reports were written and submitted by the conference organisers.

18th International Conference on Artificial Intelligence and Law (ICAIL ’21)

Online 07/21/2021 - 07/25/2021
https://icail.lawgorithm.com.br

The 18th International Conference on Artificial Intelligence and Law was the first edition of the biennial ICAIL conference held entirely online. This decision was taken by the International Association for Artificial Intelligence and Law Executive Committee, taking into account all considerations related to the overall Covid-19 pandemic situation and the restrictions related to it.

It was decided that due to the choice of the online format, the registration will be free of charge. The total number of registrations was ca. 1380, the highest number ever. The conference expenses were fully covered by sponsorships arranged by the organizers. The total amount of the expenses was ca. 6474 USD (converted from the Brazilian currency, BRL).

The conference had 89 submissions; 17 were selected for publication as full papers (19%), 17 as short papers (19%), 8 as extended research abstracts (9%), 2 as demonstration papers (2%), and 3 as COLIEE papers (3%). The conference offered 11 workshops whose topics were diverse and represented state of the art activities in the field. These were AI and Intelligent Assistance for Legal Professionals in the Digital Workplace; Artificial Intelligence in Jurisdictional Logistics; Competition on Legal Information Extraction/Entailment; Bias, Ethics and Fairness in Artificial Intelligence: Representation and Reasoning; Copyright Regulation of Inputs and Outputs of AI Systems; EXplainable & Responsible AI in Law; Automated Detection, Extraction and Analysis of Semantic Information in Legal Texts; Multilingual Workshop on AI & Law; Artificial Intelligence and Patents; International Workshop on A.I. for Understanding the Legal Business; and Relations in the Legal Domain.

In addition, ICAIL held a Doctoral Consortium, helping emerging researchers to engage with the ICAIL community. It attracted 384 registrations.

1st ACM Conference on Equity and Access in Algorithms, Mechanisms, and Optimization

Online 10/5/2021-10/9/2021
https://eaamo.org

The inaugural Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) conference on Equity and Access in Algorithms, Mechanisms, and Optimization (EAAMO ’21) was held virtually from October 5, 2021 to October 9, 2021 on the virtual platform gather.town and Zoom. The conference aimed to highlight work where techniques from algorithms, optimization, and mechanism design, along with insights from the social sciences and humanistic studies, can help improve equity and access to opportunity for historically disadvantaged and underserved communities. The conference is legally and financially sponsored by ACM Special Interest Groups on Artificial Intelligence (ACM SIGAI) and on Economics and Computation (ACM SIGecom), and has received financial support from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, MacArthur Foundation and Cell Press Patterns Journal.

ACM EAAMO ’21 capitalized on the interdisciplinary workshop series organized by the Mechanism Design for Social Good (MD4SG) initiative, which started back in 2017 as a reading group of 12 people with a mission to bridge principled research and practice aimed at improving access to opportunity for marginalized communities by building interdisciplinary pipelines that use computational tools centering underserved communities at
the core of the research agenda.

The conference had more than 650 participants from over 40 countries. It featured a single-track program including nine keynote talks (eight in English, one in Spanish), forty contributed talks, and forty poster presentations across various fields in addition to three policy and practice sessions as well as several networking and mentoring opportunities.

The conference succeeded in bridging research and practice by intentionally bringing together researchers, policymakers, and practitioners in various government and non-government organizations, community organizations, and industry. To this end, the conference had a “Research” submission track and a “Policy and Practice” submission track and featured various practitioners as keynote speakers and panelists. Overall, more than 70 practitioners from the civic sector participated (with complimentary registration). Overall, almost forty percent of non-students registrations were outside of academia. The conference provided an international forum for presenting research papers, problem pitches, survey and position papers, new datasets, and software demonstrations towards the goal of bridging research and practice. Our keynote speakers spanned practice and research disciplines from Computer Science and Operations Research, to Economics and Sociology. The conference also featured three Policy and Practice sessions to engage practitioners including two thematically-linked panels focusing on Latin America (on Tuesday) and refugees and migration (on Thursday).

We are committed to ensuring geographic and cultural diversity in our participants and speakers, as the goal of the conference is to improve access to opportunity for marginalized and underrepresented communities. To this end, our Call for Participation was available in nine different languages—Arabic, Chinese, English, Farsi, French, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Swahili. We offered live translation between English and Spanish as well as English and French during the keynote presentations and discussions. The conference also featured several keynote speakers and panelists from outside of North America.

We are equally committed to socioeconomic diversity in our participants and speakers. We offered registration fee waivers and data plans for participants who would otherwise be unable to attend. We received more than 140 applications for need-based assistance in the form of registration waivers or data plan grants or both. We were able to grant 70 registration waivers and we sponsored more than 50 data plan grants—almost entirely for graduate students and researchers in the Global South.

Overall, the conference has more than 270 students who were able to participate thanks to the lower registration fees for students, the registration waivers, and the data grants.

We are particularly encouraged by the fact that one in four participants identified as belonging to a self-defined, often intersectional, marginalized group. The conference had a near parity in gender with fifty one percent of men among the participants who identified as men or women. We believe these are excellent indicators of our success in creating a conference that welcomes and centers members of marginalized and underrepresented communities.

We received over 160 submissions from over 20 countries around the world and across fields, spanning authorship from researchers, policymakers, as well as other domain experts and professionals. All contributors were united by their interest in improving equity and developing solutions for problems in a variety of application domains such as education, labor, environment, healthcare, algorithmic fairness, and digital platforms. Due to its interdisciplinary nature, the conference attracted a very diverse and large group of members with backgrounds in computer science, AI, operations research, economics, public policy, and humanities, while a great number of papers combined methodologies and insights from multiple fields. Each contributed paper was rigorously peer-reviewed by members of a program committee who were chosen from fields related to the topics of the conference. Eight-nine submissions were accepted as oral or poster presentations.

From the accepted papers, 19 were accepted in the inaugural volume of the archival track of the conference: the 2021 Proceedings of the EAAMO ’21: Equity and Access in Algorithms, Mechanisms, and Optimization published by the ACM. We also gave awards in
the following categories: Best Paper, Best Paper with a Student Presenter, Most Popular Poster, New Horizons, and Best Tweet. Each of the five days of the conference featured one or two keynote talks that were thematically linked, followed by a panel with the keynote speakers and a discussant to bridge their perspectives and to lead a discussion of the themes presented. Our keynote talks addressed key themes for the conference: digital and data markets, algorithms for societal allocation, sustainability, education policy, and past and present inequality. The thematically-related multi-disciplinary sessions for contributed talks represented the wide range of topics and application domains of interest to the conference goals, the combination of novel and diverse methodologies as well as the strong connections of many papers to policy design: Data Standards and Datasets, Law and Politics, Policy and Funding, Recommendations and Auditing, Allocation, Transportation, Language and Bias, Access to Healthcare, COVID-19, Labor Markets and Education, Admissions and Representation, Access to Schools, Diversity and Representation, and Justice in Machine Learning.

We believe we succeeded in creating an inclusive conference on how computational tools and algorithms, together with economic approaches and mechanism design, can address equity, access, and other urgent societal challenges.

**EAAMO ’21 Awards**

**Best Paper Award** Related to the conference theme of bridging research and policy, the award-winning papers highlighted new research directions for policy-oriented work. The winning papers that equally shared the Best Paper Award were:

- Algorithm is Experiment: Machine Learning, Market Design, and Policy Eligibility Rules. Yusuke Narita and Kohei Yata

**Best Paper with a Student Presenter Award** The Best Student Paper Award was awarded to two papers with student leading authors:

- Dropping Standardized Testing for Admissions Trades Off Information and Access. Nikhil Garg, Hannah Li and Faidra Monachou
- Mitigating Racial Biases in Toxic Language Detection with an Equity-Based Ensemble Framework. Matan Halevy, Camille Harris, Amy Bruckman, Diyi Yang and Ayanna Howard

**New Horizons Awards** The New Horizons Award highlights promising, ongoing work in an emerging area of research. Two working papers shared this award:

- Facing an Adult Problem: New Datasets for Fair Machine Learning. Frances Ding, Moritz Hardt, John Miller and Ludwig Schmidt
- Project 412Connect: Bridging Students and Communities. Alex DiChristofano, Michael L. Hamilton, Sera Linardi and Mara F. McCloud

The inaugural ACM Conference on Equity and Access in Algorithms, Mechanisms, and Optimization produced the following outputs: (i) Articles, and (ii) Website & Web Content. Articles published at EAAMO ‘21 have the option of being archival or non-archival. Archival articles were published with proceedings in the ACM Digital Library and are available online through the ACM License.

**The First International Conference on AI-ML Systems**

*Hybrid Online, Bangalore, India, 10/21/2021-10/24/2021*

[https://www.aimlsystems.org/](https://www.aimlsystems.org/)

AIMLSystems is a new conference that targets the research in the intersection of Systems Engineering and Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning techniques. Through this conference, we plan to examine how immense strides in AI/ML techniques are made possible through advances in the computational systems and how the use of AI/ML can help in the data-driven explorations of the design space of the computational systems. We also investigate how new breeds of AI/ML systems enable new forms of socio-techno-economic systems and they in turn generate new requirements for research in AI/ML techniques.
This conference series is an initiative of the COMSNETS Association, a not-for-profit organization, which has organized the prestigious COMSNETS conference every year since 2009. ACM has awarded it the in-cooperation status and several top-notch institutions are its patrons. AIMLSystems 2021 had ten outstanding Keynote speakers from across the globe. The high quality conference was held in-cooperation with ACM, ACM SIGAI, ACM SIGMOD, ACM SIGKDD. The patrons of the first edition of the conference were MINRO, Amazon, TCS Research and ZenTree Labs. The conference included a Research Track, an Industry Track, Demos and a Doctoral Symposium.

The areas of interest were broadly categorized into the following three streams: (1) Systems for AI/ML, including but not limited to CPU/GPU architectures for AI/ML; Embedded hardware for AI/ML workloads; Data intensive systems for efficient and distributed training; Challenges in production deployment of ML systems; Efficient model training, optimization and inference; Hardware efficient ML methods; Resource-constrained ML; (2) AI/ML for Systems, including but not limited to AI/ML for VLSI and architecture design; AI/ML in compiler optimization; AI/ML in data management - including database optimizations, virtualization, etc.; AI/ML for networks - design of networks, load modeling, etc.; AI/ML for power management - green computing, power models, etc. (3) Applications of AI/ML in Socio-Economic Systems Design, which includes, but not limited to: Computational design and analysis of socio-economic systems; Fair and bias-free systems for social welfare, business platforms; Applications of AI/ML in the design, short-/long-term analysis of cyber-physical systems; Mechanism design for socio-economic systems; Applications of AI/ML in financial systems.

Keynote Talks
1. Sang Cha, SNU, Korea. Data Science for Everyone
2. Juliana Freire, NYU Tandon School of Engineering, USA. Towards Usability and Trust for Data-Driven Models
3. Johannes Gehrke, Microsoft Research, Redmond, USA. ML in Microsoft Teams and The Future of Software
4. Sergei Kuznetsov, HSE University, Moscow, Russia. Learning Rules and Taxonomies for Better Explanation
5. Geoff Webb, Monash University, Australia. Time series classification at scale
6. Gerhard Weikum, Max-Planck-Institut für Informatik, Germany. Knowledge Graphs 2021: Achievements, Challenges and Opportunities

Industry keynotes:
4. Ananth Krishnan, TCS, India. Scaling AI, Responsibly

Award Winning Papers
Outstanding Application Oriented Research paper
Resource Constrained Neural Networks for Direction-of-Arrival Estimation in Microcontrollers. Piyush Ranjan Sahoo


The proceedings can be found in the ACM Digital Library

17th Annual ACM/IEEE International Conference on Human-Robot Interaction (HRI 2022)
Online 03/07/2022-03/10/2022
https://humanrobotinteraction.org/2022/
The ACM/IEEE International Conference on Human-Robot Interaction (HRI) is the premium venue for publishing and presenting top-quality HRI research. The 17th Annual ACM/IEEE International Conference on Human-Robot Interaction (HRI 2022) took place during March 7-10 as a virtual conference. This was the third time that the HRI research community could not meet in person,
because of the COVID-19 pandemic; originally, we planned and hoped for at least a hybrid conference to be hosted in Sapporo, to finally bring back the conference to Japan.

This year’s conference attracted 234 full paper submissions from 30 unique countries in Asia-Pacific, Europe, the Middle East, and North America. Each full paper was aligned with a theme-appropriate subcommittee, and subsequently reviewed through a double-blind process, which was followed by a rebuttal phase, and shepherding where found appropriate by the program committee. As a result of the review process, the program committee selected 57 (24.36%) of the submissions for presentation as full papers at the conference. As the conference is jointly sponsored by IEEE and ACM, papers are archived in both the ACM Digital Library and the IEEE Xplore. Along with the full papers, the conference program and proceedings include Short Contributions, Late-Breaking Reports, Videos & Demos, Alt.HRI, and a Student Design Competition section. Finally, the virtual format allowed us to have 21 workshops framing our conference program, including the HRI Pioneers workshop promoting and highlighting especially the work of early-career researchers in the field.

Our program also included three dynamic keynote speakers, who all break boundaries with their highly trans- and interdisciplinary research: Hiroshi Nittono (Cognitive Psychophysiology Laboratory, Osaka University), Leila Takayama (University of California, Santa Cruz), and Friederike Eyssel (Bielefeld University, Germany).

HRI 2022 was made possible through the significant volunteer efforts of the organizing committee, program committee, reviewers, and steering committee. We thank the keynote speakers, financial supporters, and international reviewers for their support and participation. The conference is sponsored by ACM SIGCHI, ACM SIGAI, IEEE Robotics and Automation Society, and is in cooperation with AAAI and HFES.
Introduction

In this column, we describe the Model AI Assignment “FairKalah: Fair Mancala Competition”. After introducing the rules of Mancala (a.k.a. Kalah), we discuss the primary difficulty that its unfairness causes for AI competition assessment, and present a solution along with a description of a set of resources to aid in assignment adoption.

Rules of Mancala

Mancala, originally “Kalah”, is a variant of the Mancala game family (Russ, 2000) by William J. Champion, invented in 1940, patented in 1955 (Champion, U.S. Patent US2720362A, 1955-10-11), and enjoying popularity to this day in the United States. According to the Mancala World wiki (Kalah, n.d.), “In 1959, Kalah became the first remotely played computer game, when it was programmed by MIT students for the DEC’s PDP-1 computer.”

The Mancala board (Figure 1) is rectangular with 6 play pits per side for each player. To each player’s right is their larger score pit. Initially, 48 pieces are distributed 4 per play pit in the standard game as shown.

A player’s move in Mancala consists of selecting one of their non-empty play pits, picking up all pieces from that pit, and “sowing” them counter-clockwise, one per pit, skipping their opponent’s score pit. The Player 1 sowing pattern is shown in Figure 2.

If a player’s last piece is sown to their score pit, they take another turn. If a player’s last piece is sown to an empty play pit on their side, the player captures that piece and any in the opponent’s opposite pit (which may be empty\(^1\)). Any captured piece(s) are placed in the player’s score pit.

At the end of a turn, when no pieces remain in at least one player’s play pits, the opponent will score any remaining pieces. The player that scores the most pieces wins the game. If both players score the same number of pieces, the game is a draw (i.e. tie).

The Problem with Mancala

Mancala has been analyzed and shown to be unfair, with perfect play resulting in a first player win by 10 points (Irving et al., 2000). Indeed, any player with significant experience of the game knows that a first free move (4 in Figure 1) followed by a move closest to the first player score pit (1) will begin a sequence

\(^1\)This is known as a zero- or null-capture and is considered a variant by some. However, the patent (Champion, U.S. Patent US2720362A, 1955-10-11) mentions no condition placed on pieces being opposite for capture to occur. AI researchers (e.g. (Irving, Donkers, & Uiterwijk, 2000)) thus assume zero-captures. However, many players require opponent pieces to be present for capture as in the similar Javanese game Dakon (Russ, 2000, p. 75).
of capture threats that keep the second player
on the defense and at a disadvantage.

While not only causing problems with game
play, we have observed that this causes prob-
lems with Mancala AI assignments. We have
used this game as a regular competitive intro-
ductory AI assignment since the fall of 2000,
and have observed that the strong first player
advantage makes it difficult to discern when
a heuristic change yields an improvement to
play. Attempts to randomize the initial distri-
bution of pieces or having an initial sequence
of forced play did not adequately address this
problem.

The Solution: FairKalah

In the summer of 2019, this author and Tay-
lor C. Neller computed a 24 piece endgame
database and applied the MTD($f$) algo-
rithm (van Horssen, 2019) to compute all
fair initial Mancala boards where one or two
pieces have been redistributed to different
play and/or score pits. We call this fair Man-
cala play “FairKalah”, and have observed that
it not only improves play variety and quality,
but it also makes it much easier for students
to discern when they have improved upon a
game play heuristic design.

This forms the basis for the Model AI Assign-
ment “FairKalah: Fair Mancala Competition”
which also includes Java and Python object-
oriented implementations of:

- a Mancala/FairKalah game tree node,
- depth-limited minimax search,
- a text-based human player interface for test-
ing and demonstration,
- a simple, real-time player using depth-
limited minimax and a score difference
heuristic, and
- round-robin FairKalah tournament code that
produces game transcripts and a spread-
sheet summary.

Also provided are suggested readings, video
presentation of rules and an example demon-
stration game, and integration with the Ludii
general game system.

In a typical two-week assignment for an in-
troductory AI course, I have students work in
pairs to:

- devise an improvement to the score differ-
ence heuristic, empirically testing at least
two different heuristic evaluation perfor-
mances with provided tournament code and
a given simple player,
- implement alpha-beta pruning, thus speed-
ing search and allowing greater search
depth limits in the same real-time limits, and
- devise improved time-management, seeing
iterative-deepening as an anytime algorithm
and empirically testing how to better dis-
tribute reasoning time across a game.

When a current research project is concluded,
the Model AI Assignments page for FairKalah
will also include access to an optimal play
data set with each row containing an input
state description (pieces per pit), output game
value of that state, and output Boolean indi-
cations of optimal move(s). A longer project
student project could apply machine learning
to this data or reinforcement learning to gath-
ered play data so as to learn superior heuristic
evaluations, node ordering, etc.

Further, I anticipate that, while very strong
heuristics may be learned thus, this assign-
ment will remain relevant and valuable by ap-
plying tighter time and memory constraints for
AI players.

It is my hope that these developments will
breathe new life into Mancala game play, and
that this assignment would benefit AI edu-
cation. Contributions of ports to other pro-
gramming languages, as well as additional re-
sources to add to our Model AI Assignment
repository would be appreciated.

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03-11)


**Todd W. Neller** is a Professor of Computer Science at Gettysburg College. A game enthusiast, Neller researches game AI techniques and their uses in undergraduate education.
Call For Nominations: 2022 SIGAI Industry Award

Nicholas Mattei (Tulane University; nsmattei@tulane.edu)
Sanmay Das (George Mason University; sanmay@gmu.edu)
DOI: 10.1145/3544897.3544901

Introduction

The ACM SIGAI Industry Award for Excellence in Artificial Intelligence (AI) will be given annually to individuals or teams who have transferred original academic research into AI applications in recent years in ways that demonstrate the power of AI techniques via a combination of the following features: originality of the research novelty and technical excellence of the approach; importance of AI techniques to the approach; and actual or predicted societal impact of the application. Awardees receive a plaque accompanied by a prize of $5,000, and will be recognized at the International Joint Conference on Artificial Intelligence through an agreement with the IJCAI Board of Trustees.

After decades of progress in the theory, research and development of AI, AI applications are increasingly moving into the commercial sector. A great deal of pioneering application-level work is being done by those transferring research results into industry—from startups to large corporations—and this is influencing commerce and the broad public in a wide variety of ways. This award complements the numerous academic, best-paper and related awards, in that it focuses on innovators of fielded AI applications. It is intended especially to recognize those who are not only active in the academic community, but also playing key roles in AI commercialization. The award honors these innovators and highlights their achievements (and thus the benefit of AI techniques) to computing professionals and the public at large. The award committee will consider applications that are open-source or proprietary and that may or may not involve hardware.

Evaluation Criteria: The criteria include the following, but there is no fixed weighting of them:

- Novelty of application area
- Novelty and technical excellence of the approach
- Importance of AI techniques for the approach
- Actual and predicted societal benefits of the fielded application

Eligibility Criteria: Any individual or team, worldwide, is eligible for the award.

Nomination Procedure: One nomination and three endorsements must be submitted. The nomination must identify the individual or team members, describe their fielded AI system, and explain how it addresses the award criteria. The nomination must be written by a member of ACM SIGAI. Two of the endorsements must be from members of ACM or ACM SIGAI. Endorsements are intended to be brief statements of support (typically 1-2 paragraphs and should not exceed 1000 words) that provide additional perspective on the nomination itself.

If you are not a member of ACM SIGAI, please join here: https://sigai.acm.org/main/

Please submit the nomination and endorsements through our Google form: https://forms.gle/FnHMHuzkQ4EbzYp47

For any questions please contact Craig Boutilier (Award Chair, cboutilier@google.com) or Nicholas Mattei (SIGAI Vice Chair, nsmattei@gmail.com).

Timeline:

- Nominations Due: May 31, 2022
- Award Announcement: June 30, 2022
Nicholas Mattei is an Assistant Professor at Tulane University and the Vice Chair of ACM SIGAI. His research focuses on the theory and practice of AI, developing systems and algorithms to support decision making.

Sanmay Das is a Professor at George Mason University and the Chair of ACM SIGAI. His research interests are in designing effective algorithms for agents in complex, uncertain environments, and in understanding the social or collective outcomes of individual behavior. His recent work focuses on algorithmic allocation of scarce societal resources, with an eye towards the distributive justice implications of different policies and mechanisms.