



Public Announcement of the Results of the Joint Investigative Committee (JIC) Investigation into Significant Allegations of Professional and Publications Related Misconduct

New York, NY, February 8, 2021 - ACM, working in collaboration with a representative of the IEEE, has recently completed its investigation into significant allegations of publications-related misconduct connected with the *2019 International Symposium on Computer Architecture (ISCA'19)*.

This investigation determined several individuals violated ACM publication policies. ACM's Publications Board has assessed penalties ranging from warning letters to a 15-year ban on participation in any ACM publication or reviewing activities. Furthermore, some individuals are now being investigated by IEEE as well as ACM's ethics committee for additional violations.

Initial Complaints

In June 2019, ACM and IEEE were contacted by members of the Computer Architecture community with a request to investigate allegations of potential academic and publishing-related misconduct related to the ISCA'19 Conference. Those allegations had been widely rumored within the community and included accusations of academic bullying, violations of reviewer confidentiality, and inappropriate influence on the review process.

At that time, ACM Headquarters staff working closely with ACM's Committee on Professional Ethics and the ACM Ethics and Plagiarism Committee took steps to investigate the allegations. Based on evidence available to them at the time, they did not discover tangible evidence of wrongdoing and could not substantiate the rumors shared by anonymous sources.

In parallel, leadership from ACM's Special Interest Group on Computer Architecture (ACM SIGARCH) and IEEE's Technical Committee on Computer Architecture (IEEE TCCA) formed a joint committee consisting of members from the conference's leadership. These two groups were co-sponsors of ISCA'19. That committee's charge was to investigate specific allegations of misconduct related to the ISCA'19 peer-review process.



The Committee reviewed the anonymous allegations for the ISCA'19 conference, including interviewing reviewers and program committee members. The Committee received no direct reports of any improper behavior and found no tangible evidence of wrongdoing for the paper in question.

During the Committee's investigation, some of the reviewers provided thoughtful suggestions on improving the review process for the Conference. The Committee took these suggestions under advisement for future conferences.

The Committee did not take any further action on the anonymous allegations of misconduct. The Committee concluded its investigation in December 2019.

Second Investigation

In January 2020, additional information was discovered, including a witness who was not interviewed in the initial investigation, and evidence regarding potential violations in the review process for ISCA'19 was posted by an anonymous blogger on a publicly-accessible website. The post included confidential conference information, such as article submission details, reviewer comments, and author names, which provided the first verifiable evidence that the confidential double-blind peer review process for the Conference had been breached.

Based on this new evidence of significant wrongdoing in connection with the ISCA'19 Conference, ACM decided to conduct an extensive and comprehensive investigation into the allegations suggested by this information. ACM established a Joint Investigative Committee (JIC) composed of members selected from ACM's Ethics and Plagiarism Committee, ACM's Committee on Professional Ethics, ACM's Publications Board, and representation from IEEE. Members of the JIC were screened for conflicts of interest with the conference and parties of concern. Also, because of the allegations' serious nature, the ACM decided to hire a team consisting of outside legal counsel (Clarick Gueron Reisbaum LLP), and professional investigators and forensics experts (T&M Protection Resources LLC) to assist the investigation. On February 14, 2020, ACM and IEEE publicly announced the creation of the JIC.

The JIC scheduled and held its first meeting on March 19, 2020, to discuss the investigation's scope and establish its decision-making process. The JIC decided it would oversee the investigation; legal counsel and the investigators would gather evidence, interview potential witnesses, have correspondence and social media posts translated as necessary, and regularly report their findings. The JIC would provide direction to outside investigators and counsel as the investigation



progressed and ultimately evaluate the evidence. The JIC would then make recommendations to the ACM Publications Board. The JIC also established anonymous phone and email tip lines to receive information about the investigation from those who might wish to share information without disclosing their identities.

The investigation began in late March and continued through early October 2020, with periodic public updates provided to the Community. The process included, but was not limited to, a detailed review of related emails sent to ACM staff, a thorough review of related public social media postings alleging misconduct, outreach to approximately 75 individuals of the ISCA'19 Program Committee, and in-depth interviews of roughly 20 members of the Community. The investigation also included summarizing and translating hundreds of messages and social media posts, conducting interviews with the ISCA'19 Conference software submission provider, interviewing authors of the paper, and in-depth forensic analysis of multiple devices on which evidence of publications-related misconduct were found. Over 800 hours of evidence gathering, interviews, and forensic analysis were conducted between March 2020 and September 2020.

As part of the investigation, outside counsel and the investigators contacted individuals implicated by the evidence and encouraged them to respond to the allegations by providing exculpatory evidence or presenting credible explanations to refute misconduct allegations.

JIC and Publications Board Review

In mid-September 2020, outside counsel and the investigators presented their final findings, supported by evidence, to the JIC for its review. Thereafter, multiple meetings were held in October 2020 to present, study, and discuss the evidence and conclusions presented in the report. Based on the evidence, the JIC agreed on a final set of recommendations to submit to the ACM Publications Board, which subsequently held an Executive Session on October 29, 2020, to review the evidence and those recommendations.

During that Executive Session and based on the evidence, the ACM Publications Board concluded unanimously that:

1. There was clear and convincing evidence that several individuals implicated in the investigation had intentionally breached the peer review process for ISCA'19 by repeatedly sharing reviewers' names and reviewer scores connected with submissions. The Board further determined that these individuals colluded in supporting a submission by asking other individuals to draft messages to be posted in the conference's review system.



2. There was clear and convincing evidence of breaches of reviewer confidentiality for HPCA'19, and ASPLOS'17 discovered incidentally to this investigation.
3. There was clear and convincing evidence that an ISCA'19 author had coerced a co-author to proceed with a submission despite that co-author's repeatedly-expressed concerns about the correctness of the results reported in the work.
4. In several instances, there were signs of other wrongdoing exposed by the investigation. Furthermore, the JIC suspected that some individuals were not fully candid about their actions when questioned. However, without additional corroboration, the JIC concluded there was insufficient evidence — at that time — to tie that evidence to specific individuals to the level of clear and convincing proof. (If additional evidence of connected misbehavior is discovered in the future, ACM may reassess these determinations.)

During the October 29, 2020 meeting, the ACM Publications Board voted to levy disciplinary action on all individuals found in violation of ACM Publications Policies related to the JIC investigation. As per [ACM Publications Policy](#), the Publications Board penalties imposed ranged from warning letters to paper retraction to multiple Level IV to Level V penalties. The most severe penalty assessed was prohibiting an individual from publishing in any ACM venue for the next 15 years and banning that person from serving in any review, editorial, or program committee position for that same interval.

The JIC also provided its findings and the confidential report to the ACM Committee on Professional Ethics (ACM COPE) and IEEE for additional review, decision-making, and potential penalties related to other professional ethics violations not considered by the JIC. The report was provided to IEEE for additional review. IEEE is currently reviewing the JIC report and evaluating next steps.

As per ACM Publications Policy, those found guilty of violations had a right to appeal their penalties to ACM's President. Some of the individuals submitted appeals, but after due consideration, ACM President Gabriele Kotsis upheld the Publications Board's decisions. All decisions are thus now final.

ACM and IEEE remain committed to upholding the highest professional standards of ethical behavior. We encourage members of our community who have evidence of violations to report them to support that commitment.

Please refer any questions to [ACM's Director of Publications](#) or [ACM's Outside Counsel](#).