

Prof. Alex Grant
Conference Coordinator
IEEE Information Theory Society

July 10, 2007

Dear Alex,

In March of 2006, an Information Theory Workshop took place in Punta del Este, Uruguay. The workshop was co-chaired by Prof. Alfredo Viola of Universidad de la República, Montevideo, Uruguay, and I. Prof. Ronny Roth (Technion) and Dr. Marcelo Weinberger (HP Labs) were in charge of the technical program. The workshop's success went beyond our rosiest expectations. While we had preliminarily estimated an attendance of 60-80 researchers and students, the actual participation exceeded 150, of whom about 50 were local and regional graduate students, faculty, and industrial professionals. We were particularly satisfied with the latter statistic, since one of our main goals in organizing the workshop had been the promotion of information theory research in the region (the so-called "south cone" of South America).

We had been building up a research program in Information Theory (IT) at the Institutes of Computer Science and Electrical Engineering of the School of Engineering of Universidad de la República (UdelaR) in Montevideo since 2001, when we started teaching basic courses in IT, and working with graduate students on Master's and Ph.D. theses on IT subjects. We hoped that the workshop in 2006 would solidify the program, expose the local researchers to the state-of-the-art in our discipline, and attract more people to it. And so it did. As an example, my Coding Theory courses attracted between 10 and 15 students before ITW; the participation in the course I taught in August 2006, five months after ITW, exceeded 50! Six graduate students have either completed, or are working on graduate theses in IT, with our first Ph.D. expected later this year. Papers with authors from UdelaR have been presented at the last three ISITs (including, in the last ISIT, one in which neither Marcelo Weinberger nor I are co-authors). Some have already been published in the Transactions, and several more are in the pipeline. This year, a full-semester course in Introduction to Information Theory was taught for the first time by local faculty, and in the next semester they will take over the introductory course in Coding Theory, while Marcelo and I concentrate on the more advanced, research-oriented courses. There is a lot of enthusiasm for IT in Uruguay, and, if I may say so, also a lot of talent.

For this success story to continue to develop, it is essential that the local junior and senior faculty, as well as graduate students, be able to participate in our symposia and workshops. Unfortunately, this is extremely difficult for a Uruguayan researcher, given the very high cost of our activities, which has only been increasing rapidly in recent years, and the very scarce resources they have available. Research and travel grants are very difficult to obtain, and when granted, they usually cover only part of the cost of participation.

I would like to propose that the Society provide a grant of US\$10,000 in support of research activities in Information Theory at the School of Engineering of UdelaR in Uruguay. The funds would be used mainly to support expenses directly related to the participation of Uruguayan researchers (graduate students, and junior and senior faculty), in workshops and symposia organized by our Society. A small portion of the funds would also be used to provide partial support for membership costs and access to the Transactions. The funds will be administered by a committee composed of Prof. Alfredo Viola of the Institute of Computer Science, Prof. Gregory Randall of the Institute of Electrical Engineering, and myself, and would be channeled through PEDECIBA (Programa de Desarrollo de las Ciencias Básicas – Program for the Development of Basic Sciences, <http://www.rau.edu.uy/pedeciba/>), a foundation associated with UdelaR and chartered to support the development of research in basic science and technology at the University. A grant through PEDECIBA would incur virtually no overhead. Notice that more than half of the grant would be offset by a surplus of about US\$5,500 that resulted from the Punta del Este workshop.

With best regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Gadiel".

Gadiel Seroussi