

Message from the USENIX Security '21 Program Co-Chairs

On behalf of USENIX, we, the program co-chairs, want to welcome you to the proceedings of the 30th USENIX Security Symposium. The 2020–2021 reviewing cycles happened in the midst of global turmoil with invitations to the PC occurring mere weeks after the declaration of the global pandemic and the conference itself happening nearly 18 months later during the rise of the SARS-CoV-2 Delta variant. While the world has struggled with a range of consequences from restrictions on travel and work to illness and significant loss, we have been consistently amazed over the last year and a half by the capacity of this community to come together and rise above these challenges. It has been our honor to work with everyone who helped make the 30th USENIX Security Symposium a reality and we are proud of what we have accomplished together.

We are fortunate to draw upon the rich history of the USENIX Security Symposium and the experiences of many past chairs in arriving at a model for building this year's technical program. In an effort to remove bias and ensure fairness, we adopted, as others before us, a double-blind review process. In an effort to address the volume of papers while assuring that accepted papers received critical review, we used a two round process in which papers forwarded to the second round received significant additional reviews. Authors whose papers advanced were also provided with the opportunity for a rebuttal to correct factual errors in the reviews after reviews were completed. New this year was the requirement to provide reviews from prior submissions (drawn from ACM CCS 2020 CFP, IEEE S&P 2021 CFP). In addition to providing the reviews to reviewers, the authors are given the opportunity to explain how they addressed the concerns raised by these reviews. To avoid biasing reviewers negatively, the existence and contents of these prior reviews are only revealed after reviews in round 2 are submitted, but before final decisions.

These proceedings mark the end of the second full year of the multiple submission model with journal-style revisions. To address reviewer fatigue and to expand the period for discussion, we moved from a four deadline model to a three deadline model with Summer (June 18, 2020), Fall (October 15, 2020), and Winter (February 4, 2021) deadlines. Papers across all three submission cycles were made part of this single yearly proceedings, although pre-prints of these papers were available online after each session. The journal-style revisions saw their first full year over year handoff and a considerable number of papers in this year's program are the result of Major Revision decisions from the previous year's review cycle (31 in Summer, 58 in Fall, and 3 in Winter - the last three being a holdover from the move from four to three cycles per year). Also new this year is codifying the practice of having the previous year's co-chairs responsible for the Major Revisions they create. In our case, we were very fortunate to have Srdjan Čapkun (ETH Zurich) and Franziska Roesner (University of Washington) assigning reviewers, leading discussion, and making decisions for the Major Revision papers from the 2019-2020 review cycles. Their excellence and dedication is something we aspire to as we work to handle the Major Revision papers from the 2020-2021 season already being evaluated in the 2021-2022 season.

To implement this process we invited members of the community—previous authors, previous PC members, community recommendations and referrals, and self-nominations—to participate. Acknowledging the anticipated 22% year over year growth of the community and wanting to help alleviate reviewer load, we endeavored, with quite some success, to expand the PC. While the 2020 PC was 114, this year's PC for the summer session was 204—a nearly 80% increase. It turned out to be fortunate that we increased the size so aggressively, as the summer session received a significant increase over the previous year (347 submissions versus 188). While the 80% increase in papers was troubling, it wasn't until the Fall that these numbers became truly problematic. The Fall '21 session received 521 submissions—over a 100% increase over fall of last year and the largest number of submissions for a single session in USENIX Security history regardless of model. Flabbergasted by the outcome, we immediately reached out to the community for help and the response was truly amazing. In November 2020 we were able to add 88 new PC members (for a total of 292)! While expanding the PC by 40% in the middle of a review cycle was not without its challenges, both the old and new PCs performed admirably. We are truly amazed at the resiliency of the community to respond in such a positive way in the midst of all that was going on around them.

Another way in which we were awed by the USENIX Security community was the response to reviewers in need. Any sufficiently large PC will have issues in completing reviews on time and will have reviewers who volunteered, but for a variety of reasons, can no longer meet their obligations. However, it doesn't take much to imagine that 2020–2021 was special in this regard and while we won't go into details, it's safe to say many found the year challenging. What is truly incredible is how many people stepped up to assist when others needed help. While this happened time and time again over the summer and fall sessions, we especially want to call out here the 20 individuals who agreed to take on last minute reviews with sometimes 24 hour turn-arounds to assist when others needed help. This so call "Reviewer Strike Force" consisted of Adwait Nadkarni, Ben Stock, Brad Reaves, Brendan Saltaformaggio, Christina Pöpper, Chris Kanich, Giulia Fanti, Gianluca Stringhini, Giancarlo Pellegrino, Gunes Acar, Hamed Okhravi, Haya Shulman, Konrad Rieck, Katharina Krombholz, Lorenzo Cavallaro, Michael Carl Tschantz, Nathan Dautenhahn, Sang Kil Cha, Tobias Fiebig, and Patrick Tague. We are grateful for your efforts—we literally couldn't have done it without you.

We are both firm believers in the need for community and the positive role that in-person events, such as the conference and PC meetings, play in helping to build and strengthen community. It was with no small amount of disappointment that we received the news from the Board of Directors that this year's conference was going virtual and that the scheduled April 2021 PC meeting could not be held in person. However, the safety of our community must continue to be a priority. We look forward to a potential return of in-person conferences and meetings next year, as the health and safety of the community allows. However, we also know that virtual events, such as the conference associated with last year's proceedings can be valuable, not only in providing some continuity, but also in broadening our community to those who would find it difficult to participate in person. We have heard many positive things from the community about 2020 and eagerly anticipate seeing you all virtually in 2021. In that spirit, we also engaged with the reviewing community virtually during the 2020–2021 cycle. A town hall style meeting on October 7, 2020, told us, among other excellent feedback, that we should have virtual PC meetings each session. This directly led to two very productive virtual PC meetings on January 19, 2021, and April 28, 2021, respectively in which we were able to resolve the ~10% most contentious papers in submission.

The result of all this process and hard work from the community is before you now. The 2021 proceedings include 246 accepted papers—the largest in USENIX Security history. We congratulate these authors for producing innovative and exciting work and look forward to the impact that these papers will have on our field in the years to come. The acceptance rate for the proceedings was 19%. During the process roughly 50% of papers were advanced to the second round of reviews. 9% of all papers were accepted directly while 16% were given a major revision. The acceptance rate of major revision papers was 86%.

Two important processes engage after the paper outcomes: Artifact Evaluation and Awards. For the second year running, USENIX Security included an Artifact Evaluation. Special thanks go out to Clémentine Maurice and Thorsten Holz for spearheading this important process. A 44-person Artifact Evaluation Committee, assembled by Clémentine and Thorsten, evaluated a total of 37 artifacts, of which 34 passed the evaluation. These papers are identified by the “Evaluated Artifact” badge included in the final versions of their papers. The distinguished paper award process starts with a call for nominations from the community. PC nominated papers along with a small number of chair nominations are passed along to the awards committee for extensive discussion and eventually voting. This year's award committee consisted of Nicholas Carlini, Wouter Lueks, David Wagner, Franziska Roesner, Srdjan Čapkun, Cristina Onete, Chris Fletcher, and Mary Ellen Zurko. We are grateful for their assistance in narrowing down the excellent nominees and selecting the final winners.

Anyone who has had the pleasure to work on the organizing side of a USENIX conference knows that USENIX is a special place. We want to thank the entire USENIX team for their help in making this proceedings a reality: Casey Henderson, Natalie DeJarlais, Ginny Staubach, Jessica Kim, Sarah TerHune, Julia Hendrickson, Camille Mulligan, Mo Moreno, Jasmine Murcia, Arnold Gatilao, Olivia Verneti, and Liz Markel. A special shout out goes to the production team for helping us turn a set of submissions into a proceedings and a program. We want to thank Will Enck for serving as our USENIX Board liaison and working to address issues that required a more macro lens. Finally, we wish to express our appreciation to Casey Henderson for her leadership as USENIX Executive Director and for helping to smooth the road as we navigated the seemingly endless set of bumps and potholes this year has thrown at us all.

In closing we want to express our immeasurable gratitude to the community without whom these proceedings would not be possible. As we hand the torch over to next year's chairs, Kevin Butler (University of Florida) and Kurt Thomas (Google), we know we leave you in excellent hands. We wish you all health and happiness now and in the years to come.

Rachel Greenstadt, *New York University*
Michael Bailey, *University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*
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