



### *Rebecca Wright Receives the 2019 ACM-SIGACT Distinguished Service Award*

[May, 2019] Congratulations to Rebecca Wright on receiving the 2019 ACM-SIGACT Distinguished Service Award! The award recognizes Wright’s extraordinary service to the theoretical computer science (TCS) community through her 11-year leadership of DIMACS, which began with her role as Deputy Director in 2007 and continued with her tenure as Director from 2011–2018. The SIGACT award citation also recognized her for “continuing and expanding the research and educational missions of DIMACS, for promoting diversity in computer science, and for using her expertise in privacy and security to help shape public policy on a national level.” The award will be presented to Wright at the ACM Symposium on Theory of Computing in June.



*Rebecca Wright*

During her time at DIMACS—first as Deputy Director and then as Director—Wright launched new initiatives, sustained and strengthened others, mentored students and early career researchers, promoted diversity in computer science, and conducted research in areas such as privacy, security, and distributed computing. Even before coming to DIMACS, she worked to grow its activities and build its community. As a faculty member at Stevens Institute of Technology, she led the effort to make Stevens a DIMACS partner institution (which occurred in 2005), and she brought the DIMACS Special Focus on Algorithmic Foundations of the Internet from conception to a successful launch in 2007.

Within the research community, many people first come to know DIMACS through events associated with its signature “special focus” programs. Each special focus is a multi-year program of coordinated activities addressing a broad topic, comprising activities such as workshops, research working groups, tutorials, and research visitors. A special focus concentrates on an area with high potential for impact, and through its various activities, catalyzes collaborations and stimulates new research activities. As director, Wright oversaw the DIMACS special foci and served as a primary organizer for several with important TCS themes. These include the special foci on Algorithmic Foundations of the Internet, Cybersecurity, and Cryptography. The special focus on Algorithmic Foundations of the Internet involved over 1100 participants and organized 21 events, including a workshop on Algorithms in the Field which helped lay the groundwork for the NSF AitF program. Ongoing special foci in Cryptography, Lower Bounds in Computational Complexity, and Bridging Continuous and Discrete Optimization are part of research coordination networks with the Simons Institute for the Theory of Computing. These partnerships, supported by the National Science Foundation and spearheaded by Wright, pair a DIMACS special focus with a semester-long program at the Simons Institute, providing resources for expanded activities at both institutions and more time and opportunity for collaborations to develop.

Beyond her role at DIMACS, Wright is on the mathematical and physical sciences advisory board of the Simons Foundation, and she has worked with the NSF in its efforts to set research direction and develop the research community in security. She organized three international direction-setting workshops to foster international collaboration in information security research and two workshops for “Aspiring PIs in Secure and Trustworthy Cyberspace (SaTC)” to expand the community and improve the quality of grant proposals submitted to the National Science Foundation’s SaTC program. As a strong advocate for

promoting the participation of women in computer science, Wright serves on the board of directors for CRA-W. She briefed the US Senate's Diversity in Tech Caucus in 2016 as a representative of CRA-W and leads CRA-W's efforts in administering the SWSIS Scholarships for Women Studying Information Security program.

At Rutgers, Wright established two new education programs to engage women in computer science. The Douglass-DIMACS Computing

Corps, now largely led by its membership of Rutgers undergraduate women, carries out computing activities with local middle schools and Girl Scout troops. The Douglass-SAS-DIMACS Computer Science Living-Learning Community for Women (CS LLC) brings first-year undergraduate women at Rutgers who have strong interest in computer science into an immersive education environment, including a shared living space and academic experiences. Wright was one of the architects of the CS LLC and served as its founding faculty advisor. In this role, she was a faculty resource for students in the



*Wright with CS LLC and DDCC students and staff*

CS LLC and taught the "Great Ideas and Applications of Computer Science" seminar for the CS LLC students.

The SIGACT Distinguished Service Award was established to recognize individuals like Wright for their service to the TCS community. In so doing, the award raises awareness of the need for and importance of such service. Wright is the first woman to receive the SIGACT Distinguished Service Award, but she is not the first DIMACS

Director to receive it. Fred Roberts received the award in 1999, also for his leadership of DIMACS, including his role in organizing the highly influential special focus on Mathematical Support for Molecular Biology.

What could not be known in 1999 is that Roberts would continue to lead DIMACS until 2011, when Wright took the reins. As DIMACS prepares to celebrate its 30<sup>th</sup> birthday later in 2019, we reflect on the importance of the service of both Wright and Roberts and on their combined 23-year leadership of DIMACS. (Thank you, Rebecca. Thank you, Fred.)

#### **Related Links:**

- SIGACT Distinguished Service Award: <https://www.sigact.org/prizes/service.html>
- 2019 SIGACT award citation: <https://www.sigact.org/prizes/service/2019.html>
- 1999 SIGACT award citation: <https://www.sigact.org/prizes/service/1999.html>



*Wright at the Senate's Diversity in Tech Caucus hosted by Sen. Amy Klobuchar*