

Dear Members of the SIAM Activity Group on Algebraic Geometry [SI(AG)<sup>2</sup>] and broader AG community,

We are writing on behalf of the Organizing Committee of the 2021 SIAM Conference on Applied Algebraic Geometry (AG21) and SI(AG)<sup>2</sup> officers in response to concerns expressed about the registration fees posted for AG21. We understand that virtual conferences over the last year have varied widely in experience and in fees, and that parts of the AG community regard the AG21 registration fees as excessive.

In recognition of this, we have engaged with SIAM to better understand and communicate the budget and expenses that underlie the registration fees. Please see the **addendum (\*) below for more details**.

As a consequence of our discussions, SIAM has made available additional discretionary funds that we will allocate to support participation by groups that reflect our priorities as conference co-chairs and SIAG officers.

It is our strong belief that **students and early career researchers** represent a category that will most benefit from as complete a conference experience as possible, through presenting their work, connecting with mentors, and building ties to the community. SIAM already allocates considerable funds from its block grant with the U.S. National Science Foundation to support U.S.-based students, early-career researchers, and invited plenaries, and from its own operational funds to support students from outside the U.S. Over all 2021 conferences so far, the vast majority of eligible applicants have been granted these awards.

In order to ensure that all members of the AG community have full access to any available conference support, including the additional discretionary funds, we have worked with SIAM to do the following:

1. SIAM will extend the deadline for travel award (i.e., fee waiver) applications. SIAM anticipates being able to grant the vast majority of eligible travel award applications for AG21. To ease the burden on advisors with multiple advisees requesting support, SIAM will accept simple statements of approval from advisors rather than full letters of recommendation.
2. The AG21 co-chairs will implement a process to allocate the additional discretionary funds. Details on how to apply for this funding will be available soon on the conference website.

*While SIAM is providing additional funding, in the past we have had community members who were able to use grant support to provide financial assistance to others who were in need. If you are in a position to do this, please contact us. Our goal is to make it possible for everyone who wants to attend to be able to do so.*

We look forward to seeing you all soon at the SIAM AG21 conference.

## **(\*) Addendum**

After offering several virtual conferences for free in 2020 as a service to the applied math community during a time of crisis and great uncertainty, SIAM has returned in 2021 to its practice of setting registration fees to cover the direct costs of each conference. The eight conferences SIAM has offered this year on the new virtual platform powered by vFairs have all had comparable registration fees, have all set registration records for the conference series, and have all received largely positive reviews from presenters and attendees.

The two biggest costs driving registration fees are the virtual conference platform, including the audio/visual support required for its operation, and administrative (staff) costs. The platform was selected through an exhaustive process including SIAM staff, leadership, and several conference co-chairs. Its flexible design features include

- The capacity for a large number of simultaneous live sessions
- Pre-recorded "semi-live" formats
- Opportunities to include videos, logos, etc., in recognition of sponsors and funding agencies
- Poster halls that allow recorded videos and extended abstracts in addition to the primary poster document, with video links embedded to allow live group video walkthroughs
- Chatrooms enabled with group video set up for each live session for overflow discussions
- Exhibit hall with booths that allow interaction with booth personnel
- Onsite technical support reachable through the tech support chatroom
- Managed service of Zoom sessions provided by vFairs staff
- A Gather.town environment for breaks to facilitate spontaneous interactions among attendees
- Automatic recording of all live sessions, made available to registrants for on-demand access on the platform for three months
- LaTeX rendering of abstracts through MathJax
- Single sign-on via SIAM's database
- Full engagement statistics available after each conference

The cost of this platform, which focuses on opportunities for scheduled and spontaneous engagement, is not trivial. At the same time, staffing costs are not significantly reduced from in-person conferences.