ACM CCS Young Scholars Development Program

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Abstract

In this short document, we introduce The ACM CCS Young Scholars Development Program (YSDP); a new initiative aiming at supporting early-career researchers within the computer security community. YSDP is created and organized by dedicated chairs. The program promotes collaboration, communication, and professional growth through structured events such as talks, panels, and breakout technical discussions sessions. It emphasizes skill-building and networking, with a focus on integrating young scholars into the broader academic ecosystem. In this report, we detail the planning, selection, and execution of the program, and highlight its role in shaping a stronger research environment.

CCS Concepts

• **Social and professional topics** → **Professional topics**.

Keywords

Young Scholars Development Program, YSDP

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For the first time, ACM CCS appointed chairs specifically dedicated to the developments of young scholars to actively promote the essential values and skills for the next generation within the community. This significant step highlights ACM's commitment to the community, aiming academic excellence along with creating an environment where each member of the community learns and grows, and where certain principles are integral to our ethos.

Once the PhD is complete, a new set of challenges unfolds for early-career academics. With this in mind, we are hosting the Young Scholars Development Program (YSDP) integrated into ACM CCS 2025. This initiative provides early-career researchers a space to connect and strengthen essential skills. We view this initiative as a way to innovate while learning and practicing essential soft skills, which are crucial for success in any work environment. We aim to showcase key changes needed for the community to thrive and grow together healthily. This year, we focused on the collaboration and communication: Participants are grouped by research domain to share ongoing work and co-design a project that addresses a critical issue. At the end of the session, each team will pitch their project's motivation and potential impact.

We recognize the need for smaller, foundational steps to achieve these goals. This report outlines our efforts at ACM CCS during the organization process.

Forming the team. We first formed a team of chairs based on various factors. The most important was to create a team with people who could commit the time to make this effort a success. The chairs' definition of success was simple: to reach as many early career scholars as possible and provide them with the tools they need to pursue a successful research career; and learn from them so that we can help building a strong community for next generations. Equally important was to include chairs with different expertise in terms of research fields, institution, and seniority. For example, having senior academics in the team helped us leverage their networks and avoid mistakes during the preparation process. Finally, chairs took on different responsibilities by consensus to enhance efficiency.

Gathering signals. For an efficient kickoff, we conducted discussions with community members who have successfully served in their respective communities. We gathered diverse perspectives on best serving young scholars. Mentoring and networking events emerged as crucial components, indicating that it provides the safe spaces for members to voice their concerns. This prevents isolation and silence among junior community members. We also heard that there is more these communities want to do beyond mentoring and networking. We opted in to do the "more."

Planning. During our initial chairs meetings, we brainstormed several ideas. Although we did not implement all the ideas, we hope future volunteers might find them useful. One idea was to create a Wiki for community events, serving as a hub to collect all the events, announcements, and the instances of discord for focused groups. Our aim was to bring all efforts into one place for easy search, participation, and inquiries. We deferred this idea for the future, seeking help from those who can allocate time to it.

Formatting the events. We then needed to decide on a format for our program. Though we have received some requests to be hybrid, our event is in-person only due to the necessity of presence in breakout sessions for technical discussions. We also opted for a event which will be in the main program, inviting early career academics by either financially sponsoring them or taking registrations during the main conference registration. We opened an application process on hotcrp and received approximately 30 applications, from which we accepted around 15 applicants. We awarded PhD students, postdoc, and assistant professors including the students

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who applied for the CCS Student Grant and Doctoral Symposium conditioned on submitting different expenses per program.

Program. Our program starts with a lunch gathering and includes two talks, given by Daphne Yao from Virginia Tech and Xiaojing Liao from UIUC; a panel discussion; and breakout sessions for technical discussions. Our program is available at https://www.sigsac.org/ccs/CCS2025/call-for-young-scholars-development-program/.

Each speaker will structure their talks to benefit young scholars in the context of how communication and collaboration shaped project success.

The panel session, moderated by Fengjun Li, aims to feature several senior academics who will engage in insightful discussions around the ways to overcome challenges while conducting interdisciplinary project. The discussion questions are formed by the chairs prior to the panel session. The panelists will be asked to share the highlights of their career which was shaped with collaborations, their challenges and how they managed to overcome them. All of the panelists will participate in-person.

Our organization and acceptance process. Our program is a step forward for young scholars development at ACM CCS. Thus, during the process, we carefully worked towards avoiding some hiccups which might occur. Below, we list our decision points and priorities for our program which could be used by the future events at ACM CCS and beyond.

(1) ***Integrating sessions into the main program.*** We anticipated that it will be a struggle to attract many participants (outside of the sponsored ones) if the program was coinciding with several technical workshops with great agendas. We didn't want the participants to choose between our program and workshops. Thus, our program runs in the main CCS program. Even though there still maybe conflicts with the parallel technical sessions, it is inevitable for a conference in the size of CCS.
(2) ***Announcement of the financial support.*** We ensured that the announcement for the financial support process started early enough to give applicant and their reference providers ample time to write letters explaining why the applicant is a good fit for the support. Thus, we prioritized announcing financial support as well as program excellence. The ACM CCS 2025 website and publicity chairs helped us tremendously to make the announcements. We received around 30 applications and we selected 50% of them to award (either in the form of reimbursement, or free registration, or combination of both).
(3) ***The evaluation criteria.*** Even though evaluation criteria were not strictly defined due to the diversity of applicant backgrounds, we listed our evaluation priorities online: a strong CV with good publications or impactful results is important. We asked each applicant to provide at least one name as a reference and the chairs contacted each listed reference provider individually. The reference letters helped us understand the applicant's technical strength and contributions as well as their soft-skills.
We aimed to accept as many domain experts as possible. And, we prioritized PhD students who are likely to benefit from the program. In some cases, we interacted with applicants before making funding decisions. Each case was considered individually.
(4) ***Appropriate room selection for the technical discussions.*** We selected rooms for our event that are suitable for round tables and provide enough space for breakout technical discussions.
(5) ***Enabling approximation of the number of attendees.*** We explicitly solicited participation decisions during registration if they will attend our program. This helped us with for estimating the number of potential participants. We received a total of 348 registrations during the conference registration period. We reached out to them to RSVP for the technical discussion session, and received more than 100 responses. We followed up with RSVP'd participants to make sure that they could attend the session without conflicting with the main program.

In the end, we want participants to be fully present in the sessions, ask questions, learn new ways to improve their skills, work environments, meet new people, and stay connected to the community.