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In my first year as an undergraduate student, they told me about a math contest at UPEI, connected with some conference. A vanload of students and faculty left Dal at daybreak and arrived at UPEI mid-day; then I and the other students wrote the contest paper (still a feature after forty-some years!) After that, I heard my first math conference talks... and acquired a lifelong taste for them. Three years later I presented a paper there myself. Given that conference's formative effect on me, I was very glad that we were able to put its successor on this year despite the COVID-19 restrictions. October just wouldn't have been the same without it.

We managed to arrange a reasonable version of that math contest, the programming contest, the business meetings, and the three plenary talks (one in each of mathematics, statistics, and computer science.) Though the pandemic had reduced the number of students doing summer research projects, we still had about twenty undergraduate presentations – for the most part, stunningly professional – and half a dozen talks by graduate students. One plenary talk, and a couple of student talks, were actually about the pandemic; but we also had the usual talks about algebra, AI, astrophysics, and everything in between. (And once again apprentice graph theorists were developing their chops on cops-and-robbers games – as much a local tradition as fiddling, fishing, and fog.) Normality reasserted itself, in the middle of a very strange year.

It was a pleasant surprise to see how easy it was to organize. There were no hotel bookings, airfares, catering fees, or room fees to arrange. Our budget was well under a thousand dollars, and we didn't spend all of that: our Zoom accounts worked perfectly, so the small fund for emergency replacement of non-functional software was untouched. (We hadn't had any reason to suppose we'd need it, but it made us sleep better in the days leading up to the event.) With so few expenses, there was no fundraising, no conference fees to collect, no accounts to set up, and no financial paperwork – even with a hundred and fifty people attending.



We did not manage any social events: it would have been nice to have software that would have let us gather into small groups at (self-catered) "coffee breaks" and chat, moving freely from group to group. No doubt such software exists (somebody joked about repurposing a massively multiplayer video game) but we were pushing our

collective envelope as it was. That was the only big thing missing.

An outsider might think the invited and contributed papers, and maybe an odd business meeting, would be all that's really important at a conference. In fact, why not just read the papers on arXiv when you've got some free time? Yeah, sure: and a human being consists of sixty-five percent oxygen, eighteen percent carbon, ten percent hydrogen, and a smear of this and that. The fact is, those chats over coffee, longer conversations over meals, and the opportunity to live for a few days in a world totally centered on mathematics are important too. When things get back to normal (and they will) I don't expect Zoom meetings to go away – they are so convenient. But they may well be seen more as expanded seminars than as diminished conferences.

We shall see.