Message from the 25th USENIX Security Symposium Program Co-Chairs

It is our pleasure to welcome you to the 25th USENIX Security Symposium in Austin, TX!

We hope you enjoy the outstanding program, which includes a mix of papers, invited talks, fun evening events, and, of course, the "hallway track." Now in its 25th year, USENIX Security brings together researchers from both academia and industry interested in the latest advances in the security of computer systems and networks. The symposium is a premier venue for security and privacy research, and we look forward to seeing the lasting impact that this year's papers will have in years to come.

For the first time, USENIX Security is chaired by two people. Given the growth of the symposium in the past few years and the huge number of submitted papers, this change was necessary. It was our great pleasure to chair USENIX Security this year, and now we want to take this opportunity to describe the process of creating the program you will enjoy over the next three days. This entire process was supported by 78 program committee members: 37 volunteers served as attending PC members, while 41 served as remote PC members. The PC spent countless hours not only reviewing papers but also discussing papers with each other online and in person. In total, more than 1,400 reviews and 2,300 comments were entered into the reviewing system, an average of five comments per paper. More specifically, the review process consisted of several rounds as described below.

First round of reviews (Feb. 25–March 24, 2016): We received 468 submissions, a 10% increase over last year. 12 papers were desk rejected due to a violation of submission requirements, and five papers were withdrawn by the authors after the deadline. The remaining 451 papers were assigned to at least two reviewers per submission. The program committee spent two weeks on online discussion once reviews had been collected. As in past years, we decided to finalize decisions in the first round for a subset of papers that had confident reviews and did not appear to have a chance of acceptance. Based on the positive feedback on early reject notifications, a feature introduced last year, we decided to also notify authors early about the status of their papers. All reviews from the first review round were sent out on April 7. In total, 233 papers were rejected in the first round of decisions and the remaining 218 papers moved on to the second review round.

This year, we introduced a new feature: authors had the option to appeal these initial reviews if they contained critical errors. We decided to introduce these appeals to make sure that we did not prematurely reject papers. An appeal was required to clearly and explicitly identify concrete disagreements with factual statements in the initial reviews. We received 19 appeals for papers rejected in the first round, and carefully checked each of them to understand the concerns raised by the authors. After several discussions, we decided to approve seven appeals and move these papers to the second review round. One of these papers was even finally accepted into the program, indicating that the intended process actually works. To our surprise, we also received 70 appeals for papers that were not rejected in the first round. It became clear that the intent of appeals was not clear to many authors, and we decided to make these appeals available to the reviewers so that they could be taken into account during the next phase.

Second round of reviews (April 6–May 3, 2016): In total, 225 papers were reviewed in the second round. Most papers received at least two more reviews, and controversial papers with diverging reviews were assigned at least three more reviews. After the second reviewing deadline had passed, the program committee spent an additional week discussing the papers using HotCRP. Each paper was discussed with the goal of reaching a consensus among the reviewers if the paper had a chance of acceptance into the final program.

Un-blinding papers (May 11, 2015): Outcomes and discussion points were finalized for each paper, and we as the PC co-chairs decided on the list of 88 papers to discuss at the PC meeting based on the recommendations. We arranged these papers into groups with a similar research topic so we could discuss them in batches during the PC meeting. Furthermore, we decided to pre-accept five papers, given that these papers had very strong positive reviews. Before the PC meeting, the author names were made visible to reviewers. The un-blinding was helpful during the meeting to clarify conflicts and to help prevent authors from being punished for failing to cite their own work or from reviewers who might have a bias based on a false assumption regarding the authors' identity.

PC meeting (May 12–13, 2016, at Google in Mountain View, CA): 39 PC members attended the PC meeting. We allocated six minutes for the discussion of each paper. After going through the list of 88 papers, the PC spent several extra hours discussing tabled papers and papers that were voted to be resurrected. After the final decisions were made, we had accepted 72 papers, 15.4% of the submissions. The quality of these papers is very high—a testimony to the strength of our community!

The technical program would not have been possible without contributions from the program committee members and roughly 50 external reviewers who provided thoughtful reviews and recommendations. Please join us in thanking them for their countless hours of work! We would also like to thank Adrienne Porter-Felt for chairing the invited talks committee; Raluca Popa for serving as the poster session chair; Patrick Traynor for serving as the WiPs chair; student volunteer Paul Pearce for scribing at the PC meeting; Google for sponsoring the PC meeting; the USENIX staff, especially Casey Henderson and Michele Nelson, for all the support throughout the process; and the authors of all 468 papers for submitting their research for consideration. Finally, we would like to thank the USENIX steering committee for allowing us to have this incredible opportunity to work with so many wonderful people.

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USENIX Security '16 Program Co-Chairs