



VAG News

Brian Davey*

A brief history of the Victorian Algebra Group

The first *Algebra Conference of Victoria* was held in 1983 at The University of Melbourne. It has been run every year since with broad participation from across Australia—typically 25% of participants are from interstate or overseas.

The conference grew out of a two-day workshop on universal algebra and lattice theory held at La Trobe University in 1982. The success of the workshop led Gordon Preston to suggest that we should do something similar every year, and so the series of annual conferences began. Initially, the venue for the conference rotated through La Trobe, Melbourne and Monash, with the host university absorbing costs.

In 1987, RMIT joined the mix and hosted the 1988 conference. At Gordon Preston's suggestion, Kathy Horadam made a submission to the AustMS for formal status as a Special Interest Group. This was approved and in May 1988 the *Victorian Algebra Group* came into existence—the first Special Interest Group of the AustMS.

The principal activity of the Victorian Algebra Group is to run the annual algebra conference, whose name morphed in 1992 into the *Victorian Algebra Conference* (VAC). The group is presently funded by a grant from the AustMS based on the number of AustMS members who elect to take out membership of the Victorian Algebra Group when they renew their AustMS membership.

The VAC has a proud tradition of encouraging student talks. Many Australian graduate and honours students in algebra give their first conference talk at the VAC. Typically between 25% and 40% of participants are students and 30% of the talks are given by students.

In 2006, the Victorian Algebra Group created a \$200 prize for the best student talk at the VAC. To acknowledge his important role in the formation of the group and the annual conference, the prize was named the *Gordon Preston Prize*. So far the prize winners have come from the University of Melbourne (4), the University of Sydney (3), La Trobe University (2) and Monash University (2).

Go to <http://vicalg.ltumathstats.com> for more information about the group, the conference and the prize.

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Report on the 33rd Victorian Algebra Conference

Despite its name, the 33rd Victorian Algebra Conference was held at Western Sydney University in New South Wales from 30 November to 2 December, 2015. This is only the second time that the conference has been held outside Victoria, the first being the 23rd VAC held at the University of WA in 2005.

The 33rd VAC was organised by James East and Roozbeh Hazrat, with support from Western Sydney University's Centre for Research in Mathematics (CRM). As well as the usual grant from the AustMS, there was a very generous financial contribution from the CRM.

The conference was a great success. There were 58 participants: 35 from New South Wales, 13 from Victoria, 1 from Tasmania, 1 from Queensland, and 7 overseas participants from 5 countries.

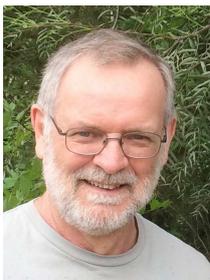
The talks were held in the Female Orphan School building. Predating even Hyde Park Barracks, the Female Orphan School is the oldest three-storey building in the country. The programme consisted of twelve 45-minute plenary talks and twenty 25-minute contributed talks including ten student talks.

The winner of the Gordon Preston Prize for the best student talk was Christopher Taylor (La Trobe University) for his talk *Algebras of incidence structures: representations of regular double p -algebras*. An honourable mention was awarded to Cameron Rogers (University of Newcastle) for his talk *Using random walk distributions for determining Følner sequences*.

Twitter was busy during the conference (check out #vac33wsu) and a photo competition was held. The prizes (stylish CRM hoodies) went to Brian Davey, Murray Neuzerling and Neil Saunders.

The Australian Algebra Conference?

A topic over coffee at the 33rd Victorian Algebra Conference was the possibility that the conference could be held outside Victoria more often and that the group could become national. This will be discussed at the AGM of the Victorian Algebra Group to be held early in 2016. Before long we may have the *Australian Algebra Group* as a Special Interest Group of the AustMS running the annual *Australian Algebra Conference*. Watch this space.



Brian Davey is an emeritus professor at La Trobe University. His research specialty is universal algebra with an emphasis on the theory of natural dualities and applications of Priestley duality to algebras arising in algebraic logic. His text *Introduction to Lattices and Order*, co-authored with Hilary Priestley, has sold over 10,000 copies and has over 5000 Google-Scholar citations. He is Co-editor in Chief of *Algebra Universalis*, an Associate Editor of the *Bulletin of the AustMS*, and was an Associate Editor of the *Journal of the AustMS* from 1994 to 2004. He was an AustMS Council member from 2004 to 2006. He has been chair of the Victorian Algebra Group since 2004. Brian is a coffee enthusiast and in his spare time he plays the ukulele.