

2008 Annual Report to the Council Committee on Meetings and Conferences

The Committee on Meetings and Conferences (CoMC) held its annual meeting on April 12, 2008, at the O'Hare Hilton Hotel in Chicago, IL. Katherine St. John, chair, presided over the meeting

Introductory items. The meeting began with a round of introductions. Time was then devoted to discussing the components that play roles in AMS meetings: the Secretariat, the Meetings and Conferences Department, and CoMC. Committee members had numerous questions, which were answered by the Secretary Bob Daverman, Associate Secretary Matthew Miller and AMS staff members AED Ellen Maycock, Director of Meetings Penny Pina and Conference Coordinator Donna Salter.

Report of the Secretariat. Bob Daverman gave a report on the April 11, 2008 Secretariat meeting.

- The Secretariat reviewed the scheduled International Meetings: Brazil on June 4 - 7, 2008 and Shanghai on December 17 - 21, 2008 (considered as the 2009 meeting). There was a report on the New Zealand meeting, held on December 12 - 15, 2007. There is the possibility of a joint meeting with the Korean Mathematical Society (now scheduled for December 16 - 20, 2009, in Seoul, Korea).
- The 2008 Erdős Lecture was given by William Timothy Gowers at Courant Institute in New York University on March 15, 2008. The next Erdős Lecture will be held at the University of Illinois in March 2009.
- The next Einstein Public Lecture was scheduled to be held at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver in October 2008. Freeman Dyson was to be the speaker. (Unfortunately, he was unable to speak, due to illness.) North Carolina State University in Raleigh will be the site for the 2009 Einstein Public Lecture in April 2009.

Report on the Subcommittee to Review the Sectional Meetings. This subcommittee was composed of **John Meakin (Chair), Susan Friedlander, Judy Kennedy and Katherine St. John.** The subcommittee reported:

The subcommittee believes that the sectional meetings are valuable and successful. The work of the associate secretaries and AMS staff involved in supporting these meetings has been outstanding. The overall organizational structure of sectional meetings is sound.

Additionally, the committee had these recommendations:

- **Invited Addresses:** *More care needs to be devoted to selection of speakers to give invited addresses at sectional meetings.*

- **Choice of location:** *Additional attention needs to be paid to the quality of facilities at host institutions in the choice of locations for sectional meetings.*
- **Scheduling and communication issues:** *Additional attention should be paid to scheduling special sessions, to ensure that scheduling conflicts between special sessions on closely related topics are minimized and to ensure that such sessions are assigned rooms as close as possible to each other. Organizers of special sessions may need to be reminded at appropriate times about information available on the AMS website pertaining to organization of special sessions.*
- **Data collection, demographic information:** *The AMS might consider whether it could collect more detailed demographic information on participation in sectional meetings. Consideration should also be given to timely collection of feedback from local organizers and organizers of sectional meetings at special sessions.*

CoMC endorsed all of the recommendations of this subcommittee. The committee discussed several additional possibilities for sectional meetings. One idea was to have a focus group at a sectional meeting, with participants chosen from among the special session organizers. There was a suggestion to pass the special session proposals that are rejected for the JMM onto the associate secretaries in order that they be considered for sectional meetings. CoMC hopes that computer projectors will be available in all rooms for sectional meetings.

There was an extended discussion of how the invited talks at sectional meetings could be more accessible to graduate students and general audiences. There could be one talk at each sectional meeting that was a survey or overview talk, given by a senior mathematician. The invited speaker could give a general talk as an invited address and a specialized talk in a special session. Another suggestion was to have a talk broken up into two parts—one part very accessible and one part more technical. Also, at a sectional meeting where either the Einstein or Erdős lecture is given, there could be one fewer invited address.

Report on the San Diego Focus Group. Catherine Roberts, who had chaired the focus group at the JMM, presented the ideas that had been discussed during that breakfast. CoMC agreed that there should be fewer committee members and more participants invited to the breakfast next year. CoMC will host a Focus Group on Tuesday, January 6, 2009 in Washington, D.C. Catherine Roberts will chair the focus group.

San Diego Questionnaire. The responses from the San Diego questionnaire were reviewed. For the first time, the AMS used an electronic survey form, and sent email to all participants after the meeting with a link to the survey. Over 1500 participants responded to the survey.

Update on Mathematics Research Communities. Ellen Maycock reported that the AMS had received formal notification from NSF that the grant proposal will be fully funded. Several committee members suggested that there be a call for topics for future years of the program.

Review of Selected Activities.

- A subcommittee composed of David Meredith (chair) and Carol Wood considered the full cycle of topics for review. The subcommittee recommended, and CoMC agreed, that there should be more flexibility in the process. The order of topics shouldn't be considered rigid, nor should the particular topics on the list be the only ones considered. For example, some topics should be considered frequently, and others only once every ten years. CoMC decided to add one topic to the current list: an overall look at the "big picture" or structure of the meetings program.
- For the 2009 meeting, the topics to be reviewed will be: (1) Special Lecture Series, Special Projects and Short Courses, and (2) Cosponsorship of meetings and conferences of other organizations. The subcommittee for (1) will consist of Skip Garabaldi (chair), Irena Peeva and Katherine St. John. The subcommittee for (2) will be Carol Wood (chair) and Ann Trenk, plus one additional member.

Graduate Students and Undergraduate Students at the Joint Meeting. CoMC was asked for suggestions on programs for the growing population of undergraduate and graduate students. The topic generated a wide-ranging discussion. The committee suggested that the flyer of student activities be reformatted to be more attractive and easier to read. Of particular concern to committee members was the issue of the preparing students for graduate school. The committee would like to suggest that a panel discussion be held at the 2009 JMM on this topic. Panel members could include current graduate students and recent PhDs. (MRC participants would be ideal). The committee would like the AMS to consider other avenues to address this important issue, including encouraging more schools or groups to offer summer bridge programs. The AMS could have a web site with information about appropriate preparation for graduate school.

Miscellaneous Items. CoMC would like to have more interaction with other AMS policy committees, especially with CoProf. It was noted that many of the issues that were considered at this meeting could also be of interest to CoProf. CoMC also encourages the AMS to continue to explore how technology could be used to enhance AMS meetings. One example would be to videotape major addresses, and post these on the AMS web site.

2009 CoMC Meeting. The committee approved the suggested date of March 14, 2009 for its next meeting, to be held at AMS Headquarters in Providence.

*Ellen Maycock
Associate Executive Director
November 19, 2008*