

American Mathematical Society

Report on the Committee on Publications

A meeting of the AMS Committee on Publications (CPub) was held on September 23-24, 2005, at the O'Hare Hilton, Chicago, Illinois.

At last year's CPub meeting, the Editorial Boards Committee raised concerns about the scope of the AMS electronic-only journals. Partly to respond to those concerns, and partly because the e-only journals are almost a decade old, the Committee decided to review the three journals slightly ahead of schedule.

A subcommittee submitted a report with recommendations for CPub to consider. There is consensus that the quality of papers in *Conformal Geometry* and *Representation Theory* is high, but the journals have a narrow focus and the number of papers published is quite small. The subcommittee asked whether these journals should continue to be supported by the AMS or whether they have outlived their usefulness. The subcommittee also recommended that the AMS consider changing *Electronic Research Announcements* into an "overlay journal" for the ArXIV preprint database.

Following discussion CPub moved to recommend to the Council that the overlay option be pursued for *Electronic Research Announcements* and that the Society discontinue the journal in its present form. The Committee also moved to relate the discussion about *Representation Theory* to the editorial board of the journal and the Editorial Boards Committee and also recommended that the Chair of CPub send a synopsis of its recommendations to the editorial board of the journal of *Conformal Geometry and Dynamics*.

The Executive Editor of Math Reviews gave a brief report mentioning the continuing improvements to the Mathematical Reviews Database and information about the latest version of MathSciNet and its new features. Also, the new MR Citation Database, along with accompanying author and journal tools now available to MathSciNet users; and a new tool for authors to provide a link on their homepage to the MR list of their publications.

A report was given by the Deputy Publisher on the implementation of central submission of manuscripts for the four AMS primary journals. The Deputy Publisher also gave a report on the new AMS on-demand printing capability used for publications designated as low unit sales. These publications will be printed when an order is received and no inventory will be maintained.

The Committee reviewed the report on the new procedure for access to online *Notices* instituted by the AMS Council in March 2005. Following discussion, including the statistics on the dramatic drop in the number of accesses, the Committee moved to recommend to the Council that username/password access to the *Notices of the AMS* be dropped.

The charge to the History of Math Committee has become outdated and there have been suggestions to replace sections of the principal activities of the charge. CPub moved to recommend to the Council the following "alternative charge" to the AMS History of Mathematics Committee:

Principal Activities (History of Math Committee)

The main aspect of the Committee's work is to solicit and recommend for publication suitable books on historical topics for joint publication with the London Mathematical Society.

The series will, in the main, publish manuscripts on the post-1750 period but will consider manuscripts of exceptional merit outside of that timeframe on a case by case basis.

A committee will often seek the advice of one or more outside experts in order to facilitate its decision process, but this is not always necessary. The AMS Acquisitions Staff is available to help the committee in any possible way, including communication with outside experts suggested by the committee.

Although most proposals will come to a committee from an AMS Acquisitions Editor, the Editorial Committee itself may solicit proposals.”

The charge to CPub needs revisions to reflect the current responsibilities of the Committee – to stay informed about scholarly publishing and the AMS program, to make recommendations to the Council (with a focus on policy), and to review the publication program on a regular basis for the Council. The Committee moved to recommend to the Council the following revised charge for the Committee on Publications:

Principal Activities (Committee on Publications)

The primary responsibility of the Committee on Publications (CPub) is to keep itself informed on matters of scholarly publishing and the AMS publishing program, including books, research journals, and member publications (*Bulletin*, *Notices*, and *Abstracts*). The main focus should be on matters of policy. When appropriate, the committee should recommend to Council changes in policy or other actions that might support and improve the AMS publication program and scholarly publishing more generally. Since policy recommendations formulated by CPub may require commitments of staff and other resources, CPub shall also recommend priorities for actions to the Council and the Board of Trustees.

CPub also has the responsibility for high-level oversight of the Society's publications and will review all aspects of the publication program on a continuing basis, reporting its findings to the Council along with possible recommendations. The committee will conduct detailed periodic reviews of certain activities in a four year cycle, as follows:

[Year 1:] Primary journals (JAMS, PAMS, TAMS, Math of Comp)

[Year 2:] All other journals

[Year 3:] AMS book program

[Year 4:] Member Journals (*Bulletin*, *Notices*, *Abstracts*)

The primary responsibility for *Mathematical Reviews* (MR) remains with the MR Editorial Committee. In the course of its work, however, CPub may occasionally find it expedient to consider matters that involve MR in a secondary way. In particular, the Committee should keep itself informed about the interplay of *Mathematical Reviews* and the rest of the Society's publications.

CPub should keep its attention fixed on policy questions, and the committee as a whole should not allow itself to be diverted from this goal by getting involved with day to day operational details of the Society's publication program.

CPub reviewed the background information and history of the policy for usage statistics for AMS journals. Following discussion the Committee voted to continue the present policy (not to provide usage statistics for electronic journals) and to inform the AMS Library Committee of its vote.

The Committee discussed the new guidelines for editorial appointments formulated by the Editorial Boards Committee. Discussion centered on whether or not it was a good idea to have a standard length of terms for editors, what the standards should be, and whether or not there are reasons to have terms of differing lengths. CPub moved to include a discussion about the length of editorial appointments on the next CPub agenda. The Committee will address the issue at its next meeting and invite the Journal Editors to join in the discussion.

The Committee was asked to consider whether the Society should consider experimenting again with blind refereeing. The history of blind refereeing and the existing multidisciplinary practices were discussed. The Committee did not pass the following motion: That AMS experiment with double blind refereeing in the next four years.

The Society has discovered journals that post articles and make changes, without any indication that the article was changed. Others journals simply withdraw posted articles by removing them from the web or by replacing them with another article. It is felt that these and other similar practices can have a catastrophic effect on the mathematical literature. The discussion led the Committee to recommend that the AMS Council endorse the following policy:

Best Practices for e-Journals

Mathematical research depends on a body of research literature that has reliable content and assured persistence. Mathematicians use the literature to anchor new research in the old, and mathematics crucially depends on the integrity of this structure. For many years, journals have provided the framework for creating this body of literature. Those journals adhered to standards of scholarship that were designed to protect their integrity. Recently, however, a few electronic journals have adopted practices that threaten these past traditions. This could have profound consequences for future mathematicians who may not be able to rely on the research literature in the way we do today.

Articles posted on a journal's website should be considered "published" unless the journal indicates clearly in the posting itself that the article is not in final form. Once an article is "published" it should be revised only in one of two ways -- by adding a link in the article to a dated revision or by replacing the article with a dated revision and adding an evident link to the original article. This practice should apply to every aspect of the published article, including the text, title, references, and ancillary information. Published articles and all revisions should persist indefinitely in the scholarly record.

The Chief Editors of the *Notices* and *Bulletin of AMS* were invited to discuss their plans for the next few years with CPub. The editors discussed ideas and plans for the journals, together with issues affecting their respective journals.

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled for September 15-16, 2006 at the O'Hare Hilton, Chicago, Illinois. The Committee moved to add to the next CPub agenda "policy on editors publishing in their own journals" as a topic for discussion, and it will review the primary AMS journals at that meeting.

John Ewing, Executive Director