Setting the Record Straight

To the Editor,

We wish to set the record straight on our article, “Seven Characteristics of Successful Calculus Programs,” which appeared in the January, 2015 issue of the Notices. Although only our names appeared as authors of this article, it was in fact, the product of a team effort and was based on a conference report, “Lessons Learned from Case Studies of Successful Calculus Programs at Five Doctoral Degree Granting Institutions,” authored by Chris Rasmussen, Jess Ellis (now Jess Ellis Hagman), and Dov Zazkis and presented in 2014 at the 17th Annual Conference on Research in Undergraduate Mathematics Education in Denver, CO, a paper that, unfortunately, was not included in the references to the Notices article.

We especially regret the exclusion of Jess Ellis Hagman as one of the authors of the Notices article and the fact that it has taken so long to correct this error. Jess played an essential role in the data collection, analysis, and writing that led to the identification of the seven features of successful calculus programs, but was not included in the writing of the article that appeared in the Notices. We encourage readers to read and reference the refereed proceedings, which contains more detail on the seven characteristics. It can be found at https://maa.org/ptc under Publications and Reports for Characteristics of Successful Programs in College Calculus.

Sincerely,
David Bressoud and Chris Rasmussen

(Received October 16, 2018)

The Back Page

I enjoy the Notices feature “The Back Page.” But I have noticed that sometimes “The Back Page” does not appear on the back page (of the hardcopy Notices) but on some seemingly random page in the middle. Is there a compelling reason for this? If not, then I suggest always printing “The Back Page” on the back page.

—Tim Chow

(Received October 6, 2018)

*We invite readers to submit letters to the editor at notices-letters@ams.org.
less-well-known institution, or while maintaining a higher teaching load, should not be put at a further disadvantage by loss of eligibility for external support for their research.

I recognize that the Simons Foundation is under no obligation to explain any rules that it wishes to implement, and I am grateful for all the impactful support that it provides to the mathematical community. I just respectfully ask that the Simons Foundation reconsider its recent change of eligibility policy for Collaboration Grants, and not automatically exclude researchers who are active and productive despite working at a non-PhD granting department.

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(Received October 28, 2018)

Referees, “Middle Class” Authors, and Ethics

To referee a math paper is a tough job and, on top of this, it is not paid! As pointed out by Jeremy Avigad in an essay published in the Notices of the AMS (vol. 65 (6) (2018), pg. 681–690) proofs are become longer and to check them “is far less enjoyable than exploring new concepts and ideas”. Thus, if asked to referee a 20-pages manuscript, the easiest answer is “the subject seems not to be in the mainstream of the journal…” or something similar.

This is one of the reasons why it is difficult to get published for “middle class” mathematicians and “middle class” means those who are neither super stars nor research beginners. In fact, if you are a super star, journals want to publish what you write because it brings prestige (or impact) for them. If you are a recent PhD and your supervisor belongs to the editorial board, then the journal will accept what you wrote and they want you to publish because, for supervisors, the success of their students brings also to them prestige and honor.

Add to all this, a lack of ethics in those involved! To substantiate my complaint about lack of ethics, I recall my own experience. In one of my papers, there was an invalid proof of a theorem, although the statement of the theorem was right. Neither I nor the referees noticed that! Only much later did I notice it, when dealing with the same topic: I wrote a two pages corrigendum and sent it to the same journal. The editor-in-chief refused to publish the corrigendum saying that “the journal was a high-quality journal and my 2-pages report did not reach the required level to deserve publication.” I wrote back calling his attention to the fact that it was a corrigendum and his last answer was that corrigenda should be sent to the authors of the paper… that is… forget the readers of the journal!

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(Received October 8, 2018)