

AMS Redirects Centennial Fellowship to Young Mathematicians

Mary Beth Ruskai and Robert Zimmer

At its March meeting in Chicago, the AMS Council authorized the redirection of the Centennial Fellowship to young (in the sense of years from Ph.D.) mathematicians, beginning with the fall 1995 application process. Details of the new program are still being worked on by the AMS Committee on the Profession (CoProf). However,

the Council voted to authorize the redirection so that solicitation of contributions from AMS members could begin with the summer 1995 dues notices.

The AMS Research Fellowship began in 1974, during an earlier employment crisis, as a postdoctoral fellowship program for recent Ph.D.s. The NSF established postdoctoral fellowships in mathematics in 1979, and in 1984 the eligibility period for the AMS fellowship was shifted so as not to overlap with

the NSF program. Eligibility rules were changed several times; since 1990 the program has been directed toward mathematicians 7–12 years from the Ph.D. who have not had more than two previous fellowship years. In 1987 the name was changed to AMS Centennial Fellowship, and the current practice of using a dues checkoff to facilitate contributions began.

Despite concern for the needs of young mathematicians, the decision to redirect the fellowship was not made lightly. The CoProf report to Council stated:

The environment in which a discussion of the Centennial Fellowships now takes place is one of declining resources for support of mathematics research. As a consequence, there are numerous directions that are underfunded and numerous potential programs that one can easily see as being worthwhile, aimed at providing needed resources in these various directions. While this point is at play in numerous issues regarding funding decisions, it has an inevitable strong presence in the discussions of the issue of what the Centennial Fellowships should be, by virtue of the unique nature of these Fellowships of being raised directly by the mathematics community for the mathematics community. An immediate example is provided by the issue of changing the Fellowships from their present form. We believe, and believe

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it is generally felt, that as presently constituted the Fellowships play a valuable role and that they have been a success in filling the role that has defined them in recent years. Rather, the thought of changing these Fellowships comes from a sense that there are other underfunded directions that should have a higher priority. This is a matter of judgement and setting priorities, and it is the sense of our committee that in fact a change to other directions, namely, providing support to younger mathematicians, should take place. Nevertheless, even within the context of moving support to younger mathematicians, there are numerous issues that arise which again concern setting priorities in a situation of scarcity.

Because of the availability of the NSF postdoctoral program, CoProf has been examining other ways of using the funds. While there are undoubtedly more young mathematicians who could benefit from an NSF style postdoc, successful research mathematicians do not always follow one standard career path. Therefore, CoProf is trying to develop a new program which will foster research excellence by targeting a different group of promising young mathematicians than those already well served by existing fellowship programs.

The term "young mathematicians" is not well defined, and the eligibility period is still under discussion. The redirected program will almost certainly target recent Ph.D.s at the pretenure stage. However, to minimize overlap with other programs, such as the NSF postdocs and the prestigious research instructorships at top mathematics departments, new Ph.D.s will not necessarily be eligible.

CoProf plans to submit a proposal to the ECBT for discussion at its May 1995 meeting and a final plan to the AMS Council for approval in August. The AMS *Notices* will keep members informed as further information becomes available. New application forms and procedures should be ready early in the fall of 1995.

However, all AMS members should be aware that contributions made with their AMS dues payment in the summer of 1995 will be applied to the new program. Proponents of the new plan hope that contributions will increase significantly so that more young mathematicians can benefit.