
Letters to the Editor

Clarification of JCW Recommendations

I write in response to Shepp's letters (AMS *Notices*, October 1994, p. 899, and June 1995, p. 656; see also Vitulli et al., AMS *Notices*, March 1995, p. 329) as chair of the AMS-ASA-AWM-IMS-MAA-NCTM-SIAM Joint Committee on Women in the Mathematical Sciences (JCW) to correct some misstatements about JCW recommendations.

Shepp's June letter states, "JCW documents advocate such things as incentive funding for meetings in which there are women speakers as a 'mechanism and incentive for them [men] to also invite junior women' rather than 'obvious big names'. This is getting ridiculous."

I agree completely with his last sentence. Shepp ridicules the JCW by using out-of-context quotes to distort its position. The JCW has *not* recommended inviting junior women as hour speakers at major mathematics meetings. It has, however, made several recommendations for increasing the number of women in AMS Special Sessions in response to the well-documented (MAA *Focus*, December 1994, p. 28, Table V) phenomenon that women organizers are much more likely than men to include other women and the observation that this seems to be because "men tend to invite to *Special Sessions* primarily well-established women who could *also* be hour speakers, while women organizers include more promising junior women and lesser luminaries" [emphasis added].

All subsequent recommendations were made in a context which implied that junior men either already were, or

should also be, invited. The proposal for incentive funding (which was not forwarded to the Council) would have supported "travel expenses of junior speakers (both male and female) at Special Sessions". The proposal which was actually sent to and considered by the Council (see AMS *Notices*, June 1995, p. 691, and August 1995, p. 896, for the complete text) repeatedly referred to "junior people" and "junior mathematicians". Nothing in these recommendations could be construed to suggest using different standards for junior men and junior women.

For those who want further information, the March 1995 AMS *Notices* (p. 357) explains how AMS members can obtain a copy of the 1994 JCW annual report.

Mary Beth Ruskai
JCW Chair

(Received September 5, 1995)

Response to Hoppensteadt Forum Article

The *Notices* for July 1995 carried an article which states, among other things (p. 775), that "Mathematicians on the National Science Board often seem not to take a step above their own interests to speak for the larger mathematical community." This sharp assertion concerns the seven mathematicians (I was one, 1974-1980) who have been or are members of that Board (the NSB).

This sharp assertion is wrong. I do not know of any occasion where any one of these mathematicians has

acted improperly as a member of the NSB, or has in any way failed to speak up for mathematics, or has used this office in any way detrimental to the interests of mathematics.

Members of the NSB are appointed by the president of the United States, an appointment which must be confirmed by the Senate. They advise on the policies of the NSF, and so act to see that government funds appropriated are properly expended in the national and scientific interest. Membership is a privilege and an honor. In my own case it also involved staying in a venerable hotel, two blocks from the White House and one block from the then NSF offices. I recall one particular time when I was assigned to a special room with a plaque: "U. S. Grant slept here". (That plaque and that hotel are now gone.)

Board meetings in my time did not often involve any issues about mathematics. Sometimes, during breaks I went downstairs to talk to my friends, Bill Pell and Alvin Thaler, in the offices of the mathematics section. The chairman of the Board told me that I should not make such visits. I ignored this instruction.

Toward the end of my term, the question arose: Should the NSF support a new mathematical research institute? Here, as on other issues, there were divergent opinions: Where do the interests of mathematics lie? I personally supported the proposal because I considered that the IAS had done wonders for the research of many young mathematicians and because, by 1980, there were many more oncoming young mathematicians. Distinguished mathematicians op-

posed the idea (see below). The decision to support a new institute was made after I had left the Board; I happened to be in Washington at that time, but I had no part in the decision. My university later applied for such an institute, but the application failed. The institute was established elsewhere.

Currently, there are certainly new problems about the NSF support of mathematics, but it is my observation that these problems arise from political considerations not controlled by members of the Board, mathematicians or not. Those members, then and now, exercise their best judgment in each case. That there are real differences on such judgment was recorded in 1981 by my good friend, George David Eliakim Oswald Longfellow, as follows (with apologies to Joe, IZ, ELI, Felix, and Bill).

CUSP Catastrophes for Research Institutes

by George David Oswald Eliakim Longfellow

By the shores of deep-six waters
In the fogs of Watergate
There the budget is assembled
There our projects meet their fate.

In the days of Russian rockets
Science was on every docket
In this heady abstract air
Mathematics got its share.

But we are feeling very sad
For we have lost our Arthur Grad
He said math would never lack
To every prof a cadillac.

Now the prospects are more humble
With the tax revolt we grumble
And with applications fumble
While the dollar values tumble.

While we do not care a fig
For the science that is big
Still a research institute
With new money sure would suit.

If new money can be had
Still more projects would be glad
Special years and postdocs, too
More instructors, now too few.

William Rosen, Alvin Thaler
Never contemplated failure
While Bill Pell could hardly found
An institute on shaky ground.

Slichter thought he saw the double
Of the physicists' great trouble
So he asked and talked around
What opinion could be found.

Then the National Science Board
Likes new thrusts but can't afford
To give any new resources
To Math Instituting forces.

Singer sang in many voices
Raising questions, posing choices
Many memos from Mac Lane
Some were cogent, some inane.

Representatives of Stein
Saw Fuld thumb her nose at Fine
Stein could leave no stone unturned
'til the Institute was spurned.

Enter Joseph J. J. Kohn
He could do it all alone
Making use of old Ma Bell
He gave Pell and Pasta hell.

"All our youngsters need," said Joe
"Is toward Princeton for to go"
Forms and foliations call
Everyone to new Fine Hall.

Trustees met in Providence
Squandered dollars, tortured sense
Then they thrashed the Institute
Without funds it wouldn't suit.

Nothing makes contention louder
Then a double dose of Browder
One on one side, one on t'other
Brother disagrees with brother.

On the shores of big chief waters
In the town of Washington
See the troubles with the budget
That Math Institute has done.

*Saunders Mac Lane
The University of Chicago*

(Received September 6, 1995)

Postdocs for Educational Programs

In his very interesting article, "Upstairs, Downstairs" (*AMS Notices*, September 1995), Mark Saul raises many relevant questions concerning the general lack of involvement of mathematicians in the mathematical education of K-12 students, including very talented students. He mentions several programs, including our program in Minnesota—The University of Minnesota Talented

Youth Mathematics Program (UMTYMP). This program provides a carefully planned mathematical education from beginning algebra through linear analysis and junior-level topics courses to about 560 students throughout Minnesota. Courses are taught by excellent high school faculty in the high school component and by TA's, postdocs, and regular faculty in the college-level component. UMTYMP is viewed as rather successful, using a variety of hard-core outcomes and surveys of student/parent satisfaction. Large numbers of graduates are pursuing careers in mathematics and related areas. The program has been fairly well publicized and visited by a fair number of mathematicians. Yet, with few minor exceptions, UMTYMP has not been replicated. As Saul notes, the Gelfand program has also had difficulties in duplication. Why has the mathematics community been so reluctant to replicate seemingly successful programs which bridge the "upstairs, downstairs" relationship?

Saul's conjecture that American institutions do not support faculty involvement in such endeavors is certainly part of the answer. But our UMTYMP experiences point to deeper reasons. To run programs which involve innovative K-12 and collegiate mathematics curriculum, operation of classes for K-12 students on college campuses, linkages with schools and parents, and involvement with students at a level similar to the Russian models requires enormous organizational and administrative efforts on an ongoing basis. Very few mathematicians are prepared for such an effort and, more pointedly, can handle this type of commitment within a traditional university/college career. Handing off the administration to nonmathematicians provides only a partial solution at best. UMTYMP's linked curriculum, development of a reformed calculus program and standards-based K-12 courses, pedagogy focused on student-centered instruction, and appropriate integration of technology, all within the format of a once-a-week two-hour class, clearly requires the ongoing involvement of mathematicians. This is an especially difficult and lonely task if

only one mathematician on a campus will work on it. The Russian models using widespread interest and involvement of many faculty and graduate students make these efforts much more doable. Most faculty who visit UMTYMP cannot count on their colleagues' involvement. Worse yet, they cannot even count on their colleagues' professional blessing even if they alone are willing to become involved.

We are all aware of the changing world in which mathematics is operating, and there are signs that the new generation of mathematicians will be more willing to involve themselves in exciting bridging programs. Over the last several years, UMTYMP and the School of Mathematics has hired three mathematics postdocs who have deep interests in the educational aspects of the program. After spending several years in an NIH-type apprentice role learning virtually all aspects of the organizational and management components of UMTYMP in addition to its curriculum, they will be well prepared to go to other institutions and start similar programs there. This type of postdoc could be a model for the profession to use as it seeks to expand career opportunities beyond the traditional ones. If we really want to have our universities and colleges nurturing bright students to be the next generation of mathematicians, this type of training and the development of these programs are truly essential.

Harvey B. Keynes
University of Minnesota

(Received September 18, 1995)

The Price of Political Incorrectness

I am writing to my colleagues on a matter of grave concern to me and, I believe, to most of us—the recent deliberate attempts by some of our faculty to impose a “politically correct” speech code and censorship in the department.

The matter started about a year ago when we received a note from the university attorney about certain complaints and grievances filed by a faculty member, that alleged perceived “hostility” and “harassment”. The in-

situations implicated some materials that I and other colleagues posted and distributed electronically.

Most of my materials were taken from respected publications, such as *Atlantic Monthly*, *Time*, *Scientific American*, and a recently published book *Politically correct bedtime stories* by James Finn Garner (Macmillan Publishing, 1995). Another part was obtained through the Internet or written by myself. All material was addressed to a general or professional audience and touched on a variety of topics from “Feminism” to “Status of the Mathematical Profession”. There was nothing personal in any of the posted items, except their unorthodox views and ideas opposite to the “politically correct” code; indeed some material was openly critical of the code itself.

I realize that the contents of the posted items could be objectionable to certain people. Indeed, a few of them, within and outside the department, expressed their disapproval, whereas others liked it—a normal process in the free exchange of ideas. Yet nobody ever questioned the legitimacy of those publications. To stress the point, I will mention a highly controversial article on the math profession, called “The death of proof” (*Scientific American*, 1994), that I posted on my office some time ago. The article stirred an emotional and heated debate within the community, and surely many people in our department would find its contents objectionable. Yet no one (not a single person!) has ever suggested that I remove the material, let alone tried to force me to do it. Fortunately, we never had problems in our department and on campus in bringing up and debating controversial issues.

However, the climate seems to be changing now. The recent activities of our self-styled “thought police” attempt to put a halt to such practices, stifle our freedom of speech, and impose the “sanctified” code of behavior. Should we allow this to happen, and how far are we willing to comply? I would like to hear the opinion of my colleagues on those matters in any open forum, like a departmental meeting.

Let me conclude this letter with a personal touch. I was born in and

spent my youth in the post-Stalinist Russia of the 1950s and 1960s, not a paradise of freedom as we know it. There the “politically correct behavior” was hardly a matter of jokes or debate, but often the very mode of survival. In Stalin’s days people paid with their lives for “incorrect” jokes.

Though in my time the pressure relented, one could still risk his job, position, and career, but in the worst cases he or she could face imprisonment or forced psychiatric treatment. (Is it not reminiscent of a recent story of an American college professor expelled from his job and forced to undergo “counseling” for a mere “joke”?)

To continue, the Soviet authorities maintained the “law and order” with an army of political commissars, activists, and informants. When I and a few friends dared to express unorthodox views in the presence of such a commissar, the friends were expelled from the university right away. I was spared expulsion, yet punished a year later on the Marxist Philosophy State Exam (failing grade). It took me another year to get my diploma, but I was denied admission to any graduate school, since I was regarded as “politically unreliable” despite high academic standing.

In 1975 I left the Soviet Union and came to the West to enjoy our cherished freedoms, including the freedom to think and speak. I exercised them thereafter, not without consequences, like the one I had in 1988–90 after speaking publicly on behalf of the department that was bashed for poor student performance.

I will resent and resist all attempts to harass and intimidate me into silence and to censor my speech by our self-styled or appointed “political commissars”. I defied them in the post-Stalinist Russia of the 1950s–1960s, and I will do it in the neo-Orwellian Amerika of the 1980s–1990s.

David Gurarie
Case Western Reserve University

(Received September 19, 1995)