

Notices

of the American Mathematical Society

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From the Secretary of the AMS

Challenges for the 21st Century

As a legacy from my ten years of service to the AMS as its secretary, I give you part of my "To Do" list, which I call "Challenges for the 21st Century". Mention of these items here is intended to provoke thought and discussion within the mathematical community and the AMS about the community and the AMS (and not about mathematics).

Challenge I: Merge the AMS and the MAA?

Mathematical research and mathematical education are inextricable. Many people feel that the divorce some eighty years ago that resulted in the two organizations should be annulled. The benefit would be an organization that would speak with a louder voice on all matters affecting the profession. Members who belong to both organizations would realize a saving in membership dues. The Society and Association would realize savings in administrative expenses. With over 50,000 members, the combined AMS/MAA would have a strong voice in all aspects of a mathematician's professional life.

Challenge II: Increase the Society's cooperation with the International Mathematical Union (IMU)?

Whereas Challenge I speaks to the role the profession can play domestically, this item speaks to the role the professional organization can play on the international front. At present the "adhering organization" from the U.S. is the National Academy of Sciences (NAS). I propose that the AMS (or the combined AMS/MAA) be the adhering organization with the International Mathematical Union and should appoint and administer the United States National Committee on Mathematics (USNCM). Indeed, in most countries, the professional mathematical organization is the adhering body.

If the NAS remains the adhering organization and continues to appoint the members of the USNCM, I propose that the NAS should ask the AMS to administer and fund the USNCM. The AMS has the resources and know-how to provide total support for committee meetings. It has the resources and will to fund transportation for members to attend IMU General Assembly meetings and Congresses. In fact, the AMS did pay some expenses for the five U.S. representatives to the General Assembly in August 1998, since the Board on Mathematical Sciences (BMS) did not have the wherewithal to fund these representatives fully.

Challenge III: Involve all mathematicians in the affairs of their professional organization(s).

Being invited to join the AMS was, many years ago, a rite of passage into the profession. It was taken seriously—one even had to have a sponsor. Joining the AMS no longer seems to be regarded as so important. It is surprising how many names of eminent American mathematicians do *not* appear in the *Combined Membership List*. Anyone who uses any of the products and services of the Society (the publications, the meetings, the Web site) should be a member in order to help support the efforts.

As for further involvement, the secretary administers the committees of the Society. In the past ten years of writing appointment letters, the names of appointees have hardly changed, just their committee assignments. This year there were just a handful of responses to full-page *Notices* ads requesting suggestions for nominations for office or membership on committees. Membership involvement must come from everywhere. Each person can make a difference.

Join and participate!

Conclusions: The Society's administration is in excellent hands. The AMS now has a publication program that is the envy of any publishing house. MathSciNet is the standard for delivery of review material. The AMS is out in front as we move into the age of electronic delivery of mathematics. It has been a real pleasure working with the staff and members throughout these ten years. I thank everyone for the support they have given to the leaders, officers, and staff, and especially to me.

—Robert M. Fossum