

Notices

of the American Mathematical Society

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Editorial

Improving the Job Search

Graduate students, looking for a job for after graduation, often seek advice from within their own universities. Too often, that advice misses the mark. Advice from the thesis advisor may reflect personal experience that is no longer applicable, or it may reflect career goals differing from those of the student. Advice from other graduate students may be based on inaccurate conventional wisdom.

The result is a scattershot approach in which the student sends identical letters and documentation to as many schools as possible. But this approach is the complete opposite of what professional career counselors recommend in other situations. Therefore the *Notices* is pleased to publish an article in this issue by three recent PhDs who describe how they used a highly individualized approach that generated multiple interviews and job offers.

The details of their approach will not apply to every situation. There is no simple algorithm for success. Indeed, the most important lesson to be learned from this article—by T. Hull, M. A. Jones, and D. Thomas—is that it pays to put effort into a search for a position suited to the applicant's own particular talents and interests.

In times of job shortages we sometimes forget that the goal is not just a job, but a position that will be a step toward a satisfying and productive career in mathematics. For some that may be a postdoctoral fellowship or a position at a research university; for others it may be a position at a department that emphasizes teaching rather than research; and for others it may be a position in industry. Of course, mixtures of these settings also occur. Whatever the circumstances, thesis advisers and graduate students alike need useful information about the job process.

Hull, Jones, and Thomas were seeking jobs whose emphasis was on teaching, and their article details how they zeroed in on jobs suitable for them. For all types of positions in mathematics, the employment page of the AMS Web site is a good source of useful information; in particular, links to various articles about mathematics employment are available at <http://www.ams.org/employment/employ.html#articles>.

However, finding good matches becomes extremely difficult when departments have to deal with many hundreds of applications. Is the present kind of process really necessary? Some may argue that little is lost for the applicant by sending out extra applications. On the other side, departments offer many reasons for not publicizing information that might facilitate selectivity. But overwhelming paperwork also causes problems. With the current system an exceptional person who does not follow a standard path can easily become lost in the first crude screening. Applicants and employers alike have much to gain from an overhaul of the job search process. At this point it is understandable if individuals are hesitant to be selective in where they apply. Real reform will require a concerted effort from the entire mathematics community.

—Anthony W. Knapp, Mary Beth Ruskai

Not to Miss

Cost of Publishing

In a feature article, Edwin Beschler gives one commercial publisher's point of view about issues behind the cost of publishing. He argues that in recent times the responsibility for innovation and risk-taking in the industry has passed largely from nonprofit companies to profit-making ones, as the nonprofit ones have become more cautious in what they are willing to publish. Investment is now what makes innovation and risk-taking possible, and profit is the reward for investment. Profit itself, he maintains, is a small contributor to the pricing equation; development costs, which accompany innovation, are much more significant. In one way or another, development costs have to be borne by the industry as a whole, and in the absence of commercial publishers, these costs would migrate to the nonprofit publishers in some way.

The article gives extensive information about the setting of prices, but the author is somewhat limited in what he can say. Commercial publishers do not share information about pricing, even in barest outline, because of the fear that sharing information might be interpreted as price-fixing. Thus Beschler is blocked from providing some of the quantitative information that the reader might want to see.

—A. W. K.