
From the AMS

1998 Reports of the AMS Policy Committees

In 1992 the Council of the AMS decided to reorganize its committee structure. At that time there were already two so-called “policy committees”: one on education policy and the other on science policy. To these were added three more policy committees: one on the profession, one on meetings and conferences, and one on publications. The skeleton charge given to all of these committees was as follows:

1. To provide advice to the leadership of the Society and to make recommendations as to Society policy.
2. To be responsible for taking a long-range view in their areas.
3. To conduct an annual high-level review of activities and structure within their areas and evaluate progress towards Society goals.
4. To report regularly to the membership, both in writing and by presentations at meetings.
5. To maintain communications with the membership and to keep aware of their views.
6. To coordinate with other professional organizations.

The *Notices of the AMS* conceived of itself, as the journal of record for the Society, as an appropriate vehicle to execute (4), reporting regularly to the membership in writing. Here is the first of the 1998 reports of the AMS policy committees.

Committee on Meetings and Conferences (COMC)

Joel H. Spencer, Chair

COMC met September 26, 1998, in Chicago. In attendance were: Roy L. Adler, John H. Ewing, Robert M. Fossum, Isom H. Herron, Evan G. Houston, Arthur M. Jaffe, Karen H. Parshall, Joel H. Spencer (chair), Michael Starbird, Karen Vogtmann, Sylvia M. Wiegand. Also present were: Felix E. Browder, John L. Bryant, H. Hope Daly, Robert J. Daverman, James W. Maxwell, Bernard Russo, Lesley M. Sibner, Robin Hagan Aguiar.

There was in general a very positive feeling about meetings and conferences. This area speaks to the heart of what we do. Both the professional staff in Providence and the Secretariat are running well. Issues always arise, but in all cases it seems the critical point is as it should be: what can be done to make it easier for mathematicians to prove and conjecture.

1. International Meetings

Secretary Robert Fossum spoke about our ongoing program of international meetings. We have a biennial meeting with the Sociedad Matematica Mexicana (SMM). Otherwise we have roughly one such meeting a year: 1996 in Belgium, 1997 in South Africa, an upcoming 1999 meeting in Australia, and two 2000 meetings—one in Denmark and one (tentative) in Hong Kong.

There was a unanimous and very positive feeling toward these meetings. There was discussion over the frequency of such meetings, but, as they are still evolving and each one is in many ways a special event, no particular goal was given.

The joint meetings with the SMM were discussed at length. This year, for the first time, we will have the joint meeting in the United States—in Denton, Texas. There was a strong feeling that we should reciprocate the hospitality shown us in previous meetings. Further, there was a sense that as Mexico is our neighbor, it was right and proper to view these meetings somewhat separately from our other international meetings, even while administratively they were being handled the same. COMC voted unanimously for the following statement of support:

COMC views the relationship with the Sociedad Matematica Mexicana as being special and endorses the Secretariat's efforts to financially support these meetings.

2. Special Lectures

Karen Vogtmann presented the report of the Subcommittee to Review Special Lecture Series and Special Projects. The Colloquium and Gibbs lectures are both running very well and have a particularly important role at our national

meetings. There was discussion about possible resurrection of the Progress in Mathematics Lectures. The Erdős Lecture will first be given at Denton and then should be given annually at an AMS meeting. Details on this remain to be worked out.

3. Summer Conference Program

The AMS-IMS-SIAM Joint Summer Research Conferences consist of 5 to 7 one-week conferences held in the same place (on different topics) during the summer. There is also a three-week Summer Research Institute.

The mathematical content of these conferences is not an issue. All who have attended and/or organized such meetings report enthusiastically. Further, the efforts of our Providence office have made organizing relatively easy. Essentially, an organizer needs to determine only two things: the scientific program and the amount of support for participants. The AMS conference coordinator handles all other aspects concerning logistics and administration of a conference.

These conferences are very much in flux, and their future is by no means assured. The current funding runs through summer 1999. In February 1998 the AMS joined with SIAM in submitting a proposal for future funding of the AMS-IMS-SIAM Joint Summer Research Conferences to the Division of Mathematical Sciences' institutes recompetition. This was done at the direction of DMS in spite of the fact that this conference activity did not appear to fit very well into the format of a fixed-site institute. Opportunities for future funding of the conferences appeared to hinge on submitting to this competition. In July DMS notified AMS and SIAM that our proposal was being dropped from further consideration within the institutes recompetition, but we were informed that DMS would consider a suitably revised proposal within its Infrastructure Program, the traditional home for conference proposals from the various societies. John Ewing and Jim Crowley followed up by visiting with Don Lewis and Infrastructure Program officers in early September. With further clarification from this meeting, plans have been put in place to revise the proposal and resubmit it in November. The proposal will request funding for conference activity from 2000 through 2004.

Money is not the only problem here. In the past there has been a lack of proposals for these conferences. We noted, however, that this was reversed in the last go-around, which was taken as a very hopeful sign. There are difficulties here, but also great opportunities. What is needed is a revitalization of this program.

NOTE: The AMS has recently received word that NSF will be funding the Joint AMS-IMS-SIAM Summer Conference Program.

4. Abstracts: Paper and Electronic

Abstracts for the scientific program for sectional meetings are now being handled electronically. Abstracts are available on the AMS Web site as soon as the program is posted. In an effort to move the deadlines for the submission of abstracts closer to the meetings themselves, effective this year the paper publication of the meeting program in the

Notices has been appearing after the meeting itself has taken place. (This does not affect participants at the meeting, as a current copy of the program with abstracts is given to all registered participants at the start of the meeting.) This is a necessary consequence given the current (shortened) deadline for submission and the current frequency of *Notices* publication. In this instance the advantages of the shortened deadline outweigh the paper publication of the schedule. It was noted that all other information about the meetings, including titles of Special Sessions, will still appear in the *Notices*. Further, information about the Web site address for the meetings is clearly given in the *Notices*.

A motion was made and seconded. All were in favor of COMC endorsing the efforts of the Secretariat to halt paper production of the scientific program for sectional meetings in the *Notices* and to designate the Web version of these programs as the official program.

John Ewing noted that designation of the Web version as the official program will require special archival efforts. It was appreciated that implementation of the above motion will first require resolution of these technical issues.

5. Summer 2000 Meeting

Felix Browder reported on the current status of the August 2000 Mathematical Challenges of the 21st Century meeting, to be held at UCLA on August 7-10, 2000.

6. Sectional Meetings

It was noted that the registration fee for sectional meetings has remained static at \$30 for several years. There was discussion about the possibility of simultaneously increasing the registration fee by a modest amount and upgrading the services offered. No firm conclusions were reached.

7. Future Projects

A modification was made in our schedule of reviews. In view of the uncertainty surrounding the summer conference program, we have put off review of that program until 2002, by which time it is hoped that it will be on sound footing. For this coming year a subcommittee will examine the scientific program at the national meeting. This will include the writing of a mission statement for the meeting. The committee will consist of Michael Starbird (chair), Karen Parrish, and Lesley Sibner representing the Secretariat.

8. Next Meeting

COMC agreed to hold its next meeting in Providence at AMS headquarters. This confirmed an agreement in principle from last year's meeting. The thought was that occasional meetings at the Providence office would be very beneficial in giving committee members a sense of the professional staff organization.

9. Future Meetings

COMC agreed in principle to move its meetings to the spring, beginning in spring 2000.

Preliminary List of Candidates for 1999 AMS Election

President Elect

Hyman Bass
Daniel W. Stroock

Vice President

David Eisenbud
Thomas G. Kurtz

Trustee

Eric M. Friedlander
Donald E. McClure

Member at Large of the Council

Patricia E. Bauman
William Fulton
Susan C. Geller
Martin Golubitsky
Ellen Kirkman
Jonathan M. Rosenberg
Claude M. Schochet
Ronald J. Stern
Lisa M. Traynor
William Yslas Velez