

Notices

of the American Mathematical Society

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From the Secretary of the AMS

What Has Happened to Meetings Programs?

Readers may have noticed changes recently in how the *Notices* publishes programs of AMS meetings. Ever since its founding in 1954, the *Notices* had published full programs of all meetings, national as well as sectional, usually prior to the meeting date. Throughout 1998 the *Notices* printed full programs of sectional meetings, but typically did so after the meeting date, an anachronistic procedure designed to fulfill a provision of the AMS bylaws. Since the start of 1999, sectional meeting programs no longer appear in the paper copy of the *Notices*, only in the electronic version, which has become the archived edition.

The force driving this change in publication practice stems from dramatic changes in the nature of the *Notices* itself. In 1995 the journal became “enhanced” as a livelier and more informative magazine; in addition to the traditional AMS reports and basic news features, it now includes articles about mathematics and mathematicians, information about the profession, articles about the AMS, and more, all configured in striking new ways consciously aimed at generating broader interest. Besides enhanced content, printing also became more colorful, elaborate, and professional, and as a result it took longer; in particular, the time interval between forwarding of material to the printer and mailing of issues increased significantly.

The AMS Secretariat—the secretary and the four associate secretaries—tinkered briefly with a goal of setting deadlines for abstract submission no more than three months prior to meeting dates. Quickly it became clear that, due to the new production schedule, this goal simply could not be maintained. Faced with a schedule that would put most abstract deadlines at least four months before the meeting date, the Secretariat first shortened that interval at the expense of advance *Notices* publication and then, late in 1998, reluctantly decoupled the meeting program from the print version of the *Notices*.

Of course, neither move could have been contemplated without the new publication options available on the World Wide Web. Since 1996 the AMS has posted full meeting programs on its e-MATH Web site almost instantly after putting them together. This makes available comprehensive and continually updated meeting information and does so much earlier than anyone previously had been accustomed to receiving it. The subsequent addition of links to individual abstracts has made the e-MATH version of meeting programs even more valuable. For most purposes and most interested parties, this Web posting seems to fill the bill.

Nonetheless, several people, not just those expecting to attend a meeting, justifiably have lamented the disappearance of program data from the *Notices*. When faced with proposals to change, no one doubted the value of early hardcopy publication, but the tangible benefit carried more weight. Now abstract deadlines for sectional meetings occur approximately six to seven weeks prior to the meeting, which the Secretariat likes to believe is more reasonable for speakers and leads to more accurate meeting programs. Once the initial choice was made, belated publication seemed too peculiar and its appeal too limited to justify the expense.

Currently no corresponding changes are envisioned in the program publication method for the annual Joint Mathematics Meetings in January. Due to the vast array of talks and other activities then, participants must carefully plan how to spend their days, and having paper copy of the program at hand in advance seems a useful aid.

—Robert J. Daverman