Notices

of the American Mathematical Society

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AMS in the Twentieth Century

A Different Era of Advertising

"Are you looking for mental whetstones?" the advertisement asked. "It is well known that one mind may sharpen itself against another. The results are abundantly evident at Battelle Columbus and Battelle Northwest: Young, untried men work with scientists of established stature. Both gain."

The advertisement, which appeared in the August 1967 issue of the *Notices*, called for the "truly superior ones" to apply for research positions at the Battelle Memorial Institute. The fact that in the 1960s the *Notices* carried many such advertisements illustrates the impact of the post-Sputnik science boom on the job market for mathematicians. Consulting firms, computer manufacturers, oil companies, defense contractors, government agencies, and others fairly begged mathematicians to apply.

Metaphors like "mental whetstones" seem to indicate a somewhat desperate desire to stand out from the crowd. One full-page advertisement from Douglas Missile and Space Systems Division, which ran in the June 1965 issue, tried to get readers' attention by displaying two series, $1 - \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{3} - \frac{1}{4} + \ldots$ and $1 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{1}{4} + \ldots$. "Which series would you select to represent an approach to your professional goals?" the advertisement asked. The question was evidently not rhetorical, for it is answered, "Obviously the one that converges on your goals." That the question and its answer might leave some readers saying "Huh?" did not seem to enter the minds of the copywriters.

Other advertisements stated the obvious. "Strangely enough, few [employment advertisements] say much about work," earnestly stated an October 1965 ad from the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA). "Since work is the main purpose of employment, we'd like to say merely that the Center for Naval Analyses of The Franklin Institute employs operations and systems analysts, mathematicians, physical scientists, and research engineers …."

The wordiness of many of the advertisements is striking, as is the frank expectation that all candidates would be male. "Westinghouse-Baltimore is seeking a man to lead the mathematics section of the Electronics Division," reads the opening sentence of an advertisement in the April 1961 issue. Another ad from CNA, in the April 1966 issue, had a photograph of two people doing calculations. In case one does not notice they are both male, the text points this out: "On the blackboard before these men is a part of the mathematical model they are developing …."

As the Vietnam War escalated, the fact that many of the advertisers were defense research organizations or contractors began to raise concerns among mathematicians. The advertising section of the June 1967 issue carried an appeal, clearly marked as a "paid announcement", signed by 43 mathematicians. "Mathematicians: Job opportunities in war work are announced in the *Notices*, the Society's Employment Register, and elsewhere," the appeal stated. "We urge you to regard yourselves as responsible for the uses to which your talents are put. We believe this responsibility forbids putting mathematicians in the service of this cruel war." The appeal was repeated in subsequent issues, and by its appearance in the August 1968 issue there were around 350 signatories. Also by that time the number of employment advertisements was markedly down, though whether the appeal caused the decrease is not clear.

—Allyn Jackson