

The U.S. National Committee for Mathematics

Let me be upfront; most mathematicians probably have no knowledge about the U.S. National Committee for Mathematics (NCM). Indeed, I first heard of the NCM only shortly before being selected as a member.

The NCM is a National Research Council committee whose members are appointed by the president of the National Academy of Sciences. This committee serves as the liaison between the U.S. mathematical community and the International Mathematical Union (IMU). It selects the U.S. delegates to the IMU General Assembly, which is held every four years prior to the International Congress of Mathematicians (ICM), and it proposes resolutions for consideration by the Assembly. (A parallel committee, chaired by Daniel Goroff, promotes mathematics instruction.) So if you have any concerns about how the IMU does its business or suggestions for improvements, contact the NCM. Are you worried about how prizes or speakers are selected or how conferences and officers are chosen? Contact us. As is true with the IMU, the NCM has an interest in promoting worldwide mathematics, particularly in developing countries.

To illustrate, a penalty of living in a period of relative affluence is that students who might normally consider mathematics as a career now look to law or business. To help counter this problem, which could damage mathematics on the international scene, the NCM organized as part of our Pacific Rim initiative a session in Hong Kong, where Ron Graham lectured to high school students, teachers, and administrators on the challenges of mathematics. To help both international and American mathematics, Graham's lecture is on our website, <http://www7.nationalacademies.org/usnc-math/index.html>; at this site you can also find the current list of NCM members.

We all know that to do mathematics, we need to know what mathematics is doing. Unfortunately, many developing countries simply do not have the resources to develop appropriate libraries or provide access to the current literature. Recognizing this reality, the NCM has been lobbying mathematical societies and publishers in the U.S. and elsewhere and successfully promoted a resolution at the General Assembly in Shanghai in August 2002 to encourage making published papers freely available on the Internet no more than five years after publication. Five years is a compromise; while we would like everything available immediately, economic realities dictate some time lag. Also, while our stated concerns are directed toward developing countries, we fully appreciate how this program will benefit many American mathematicians.

Wouldn't it have been nice to have been at the 2002 Beijing ICM? The ICM is where some of the best mathematics and some of the directions for the immediate future

are described. OK, so most of us could not attend. However, the NCM is working with Zhi-Ming Ma (chair of the local organizing committee for the Beijing ICM) and the Mathematical Sciences Research Institute in Berkeley to make the ICM plenary talks available on streaming video.

Let me now describe the resolutions proposed by the NCM and our delegation to the IMU General Assembly in Shanghai. One which we worked on with the Association for Women in Mathematics and with the European Women in Mathematics honors Emmy Noether while providing a platform for outstanding mathematicians who also happen to be women. The last three ICMs had an Emmy Noether lecture, and we asked to have this tradition continue for the next two. Our resolution passed by acclamation.

A second resolution reflects the reality that mathematics is a global enterprise that transcends political boundaries. Recently, however, there have been calls for mathematicians to engage in a scientific boycott to protest the policies of a certain government. We should remember that an action of this kind after World War I nearly ruined the IMU and set back mathematics. A related concern is the new constraint on global scientific mobility that accompanies heightened security. While the NCM supports security, the health of mathematics mandates a relatively free flow of mathematics and mathematicians; policies must be balanced and realistic. To capture our concern over all of these issues, the NCM introduced the following resolution: "Notwithstanding these times of heightened tension and security concerns, we urge a continuation of scientific exchange and publication. The IMU opposes efforts either by governments, organizations, or individuals to restrict contacts and interactions in the world mathematical community. Specifically we oppose holding individual mathematicians liable for the actions of their governments. The IMU endorses the principles expressed in the International Council for Science (ICSU) Article 5 of Statutes." After an active General Assembly discussion which reflected the international concern about these issues, our resolution passed with only one informal abstention.

Associated with this resolution is a growing worry by many American mathematicians about visa problems and the increasing difficulties in having students or colleagues from other countries visit and work with us. This is an ongoing issue being addressed by the NCM.

This brief description provides a glimpse into NCM activities. But we want to expand. We are working to more fully involve the main mathematical societies, mathematics departments, and you. If you have any suggestions about how to advance mathematics on the international scene, please let us know!

—Don Saari
University of California at Irvine
Chair of the NCM and the U.S. delegation
to the Shanghai General Assembly
dsaari@uci.edu

Letters to the Editor

Kurt Gödel and Grinzing

I found John Dawson's article "Max Dehn, Kurt Gödel, and the Trans-Siberian Escape Route" in the October 2002 issue fascinating. The picture on page 1072 of Gödel and his wife "in Vienna" looks as though it was taken in Grinzing, a well-known wine suburb of Vienna.

Several years ago when my wife and I were wandering through the back streets of Grinzing, we came across a large building that looked as though it had at one time been an apartment house. On the front of the house were two plaques honoring former residents. One was the great conductor (and erstwhile Nazi, I'm afraid) Karl Böhm, and the other was Kurt Gödel. Gödel's plaque commemorated him as the discoverer of the "incompleteness theorem" or "theorems", I don't recall which. Anyway, Gödel did live in Grinzing, and the picture probably was taken there.

Another illustrious Grinzing (he spent his summers there) was Franz Schubert; his statue can be seen not far from the Gödel-Böhm residence. And a short bus ride away is Heiligenstadt, where Beethoven spent some of his summers and where he wrote his celebrated testimony. A rather civilized place, Vienna! I wonder if there is a plaque in Princeton to indicate Gödel's residence there.

—Paul Zweifel
Virginia Tech
zweifel@member.ams.org

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Academic Boycotts

This letter relates to the issues raised by academic boycotts.

ICSU, the International Council for Science, is the umbrella organization that comprises national scientific institutions and international scientific unions such as the International Mathematical Union, the sponsor of the International Congress of Mathematicians. Its membership includes, under varying arrangements, almost all countries in the world that have citizens contributing to scholarly research in the sciences. In the United States the adhering organization is the National Academy of Sciences.

Recently the ICSU Standing Committee on Freedom in the Conduct of Science (SCFCS) felt it appropriate to draft

a statement relating to boycotts. The title of the statement is "Israeli Scholars: A Statement by ICSU/SCFCS". Its final sentence addresses the proper business of professional communities such as the worldwide community of professional mathematicians. It quotes the leader in the *London Evening Standard* on July 10, 2002: "Intellectual communities world-wide are in the business of fostering international understanding and co-operation not of penalising each other for the shortcomings of their governments."

—Joan S. Birman
Barnard College and Columbia
University
jb@math.columbia.edu

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Editor's Note: The text of the ICSU statement cited in the above letter is posted on the Web at <http://www.icsu.org/Library/Central/Statem/israeli-schol.html>. Drafted and signed by the SCFCS, it was endorsed by the Executive Board of ICSU. It is reprinted below with permission of the executive secretary of the SCFCS.

Israeli Scholars: ICSU/SCFCS Statement

Since its inception in 1931, the International Council for Science (ICSU) has affirmed and vigorously upheld the principle of universality of science based on the human right of scientists throughout the world to participate in scientific activity without any discrimination on the grounds of citizenship, religion, creed, political stance, ethnic origin, race, colour, age or gender. It has argued that the processes of academic research and scholarship, and the unfettered pursuit of knowledge, are of benefit to mankind as a whole. Moreover, they are dependent for their advance upon the freedom of scholars to converse, to make contact, to travel to conferences, to publish their results and to proffer advice. It is, therefore, in the interests of governments, institutions and above all individuals—whether themselves scholars or not—to support this principle of non-discrimination. Bona fide scholars pursuing academic activities should be free to do so without hindrance.

Recent moves to foster an academic boycott of Israeli scientists and the dismissal of two Israeli scholars from their

roles on the editorial boards of two journals published in the United Kingdom are a flagrant breach of this principle and have rightly drawn substantial adverse comment from scientists, newspaper columnists and human rights activists in the United Kingdom.

On behalf of the Executive Board of ICSU, we draw attention to these events to remind all our national member academies and research councils and our scientific unions and associates of the critical importance of the principle of non-discrimination and of the need for constant vigil in securing its continuing adoption. We understand the strong feelings generated by conflicts, for example that in the Middle East, and the desire of individuals and groups to avoid contact, actively boycott or otherwise demonstrate distaste or disgust for the actions of nation state governments and others. But to do so through the medium of individual scholars is to sacrifice a profoundly important principle of freedom.

We urge all scholarly communities and not least those in science and technology, to heed the words of the Leader in the *London Evening Standard* on 10 July 2002: "Intellectual communities world-wide are in the business of fostering international understanding and co-operation not of penalising each other for the shortcomings of their governments."

—James C. I. Dooge
Chairman

Peter Schindler
Executive Secretary
ICSU Standing Committee on Freedom
in the Conduct of Science

Pile of Crabs

I normally quite enjoy the illustrations on the cover of the *Notices*, but I found the one on the October 2002 issue to be quite disgusting. This was a pile of dead crabs and (lest the point be missed) a mallet clearly there to clobber the unfortunate crustaceans.

Perhaps I should lighten up, but I prefer not to have my favorite professional organization portray the slaughter of fellow creatures as an incentive to attend one of its meetings.

—Dale Rolfsen
University of British Columbia
rolfsen@math.ubc.ca

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