

Letters to the Editor

More on Non-English Names

My letter “Non-English names of prominent mathematicians” appeared in the April 2008 issue of the *Notices*. Since then I have received numerous emails with additions and corrections. The original list of names has grown from two pages to five pages. The address of the updated PDF file is http://www2.onu.edu/~mcaragiul/bonus_files/Names.pdf. It can be found easily on the department page of the Department of Mathematics at Ohio Northern University. Many thanks to all contributors! Further additions and corrections are welcome.

—*Khristo Boyadzhiev*
Ohio Northern University
k-boyadzhiev@onu.edu

(Received September 3, 2008)

WHAT IS...a Mathematics Professor?

With much interest, I've been following the “What is...?” Communications column in the *Notices*. It seems to me that a valuable contribution to mathematics and mathematics education could be made by discussing, in detail, what it means to be a professor. However, with hundreds of disciplines in the larger universities, this might be much too broad a subject to treat easily. Hence, what does it mean to be a mathematics professor? Note that I am not asking the narrower question of what it means to be either a great or a good mathematics professor. Later on, one could discuss those special subclasses of mathematics professors or even generalize the discussions to professors in other disciplines. I conjecture that it would not be good for mathematics if no one can propose a satisfactory answer or most everyone ignores such simple questions. What is a mathematics professor? Surely a candidate for a degree or a position would have a suitable answer.

—*Albert A. Mullin*
1orrm@earthlink.net
(Received October 4, 2008)

A Formula for Citations

The article “Citation statistics: An IMU report” (*Notices*, September 2008), summarizing the report (<http://www.mathunion.org/publications/report/citationstatistics/>), makes it once again clear how flawed the impact factor is. However, as to the right way to count citations, I felt the issue of single-author versus co-author was neglected. Moreover, in order to not only discard self-citations but also citations from one's “circle of friends”, I propose the following tough but fair (as much as a single number can possibly be) citation count $f(X)$ of an individual X .

Some fixed article A that cites some fixed article Y of X should be accounted for as follows. First, in order for A to have any effect at all,

the group of authors of A must not contain X , nor anybody who has ever been a co-author of X . That condition being satisfied, the contribution of A to Y 's count $g(Y)$ should be $1/n$ where $n - 1$ is the number of authors that X relied upon to produce Y . The fraction $1/n$ is not a slighting of Y 's impact, it only takes into account that in the same time that a hypothetical single author X' of X 's caliber writes one article of Y 's quality, the co-author X produces n such articles (assuming all co-authors contribute equally). By definition $f(X)$ is the sum of all $g(Y)$ where Y ranges over all articles of X .

—*Marcel Wild*
University of Stellenbosch
mwild@sun.ac.za
(Received October 9, 2008)

Correction

There was an error in the drawing that accompanied the article “WHAT IS... a Cross Ratio?” by François Labourie in the November 2008 issue of *Notices* (page 1234). The corrected drawing is shown below and the accompanying relevant text “...let finally z and t be the centres of two horospheres tangent to both C_x and C_y respectively. Then ... x, y, z, t .” should instead read “... let finally z and t be the centres of two horospheres tangent to each other as well as to C_x and C_y respectively. Then ... y, z, x, t .”

—*Sandy Frost*

