

Letters to the Editor

The Standards 2.0

I did a double take when I read the second sentence of Solomon Garfunkel's "What's a Math Educator to Do?" (*Notices*, August 2012, p. 909): "I truly think that the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics (CCSSM) are a disaster."

As I read on, it turns out that he "was actually on the writing team for CCSSM," will retrain teachers, will "be involved with the implementation of CCSSM," "will work with assessment consortia," "will sit on advisory boards for curriculum projects," etc.

Between 1991 and 2001, I attended various open houses at my local public school system. Every nauseating mathematics doorstep was ballyhooed as "meeting the Standards." Therefore, I am appalled by Garfunkel's clam concerning "the 1989 Standards of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), which were never given a fair chance to succeed." At a recent conference, I heard a similar lame excuse from someone who has been a leading promoter of the Standards since 1989.

It is not at all surprising that the latest promotion in mathematics education is being peddled by many of the same people who are responsible for the Standards and "reform math" disaster of the past twenty-three years. The hierarchy of the AMS must speak up and expose those who continue to play such key roles in the continuing pseudo-education of American students.

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Standards for Publishing Errata

At a recent mathematical conference I had several conversations with other researchers on the uncomfortable topic of publishing errata for math articles where proofs of some of the main results turned out to be incomplete or incorrect. I was

surprised when several senior mathematicians in my area expressed the opinion that publishing an erratum in the above circumstances should not be regarded as mandatory and that acknowledging the mistake, in private communications or at one's webpage, may be sufficient. I had always thought that publishing an erratum, if a published proof of your significant result falls through, is a basic tenet of professional ethics for a research mathematician. The AMS ethical guidelines, adopted by the AMS Council in 2005, say as much. While the number of published mathematical papers, and presumably the number of serious errors in them, has been rapidly increasing in recent years, the number of published errata, particularly in pure mathematics, has not necessarily kept pace. At the same time, the tolerance among the mathematical community for allowing incorrect published proofs to remain standing without published errata or corrigenda appears to have been quietly increasing. After several MathSciNet searches, I observed that applied math and physics journals were more apt than pure math journals to publish errata, and that AMS journals have a fairly problematic record here. From 2000 to 2011, *Communications in Mathematical Physics* published 2778 articles and 41 errata. For the same period *Transactions of the AMS* published 2966 articles and 12 errata, and *Proceedings of the AMS* published 5688 articles and 27 errata. By comparison, *Inventiones Mathematicae* published 817 articles and 19 errata. On the other hand, the *Journal of the London Mathematical Society* had even more startling statistics: 1191 articles and only 2 errata. I am not sure what exactly to make of this data. Nevertheless, I am certain that mathematical papers are refereed less carefully these days than in the past and that, with the increasing pace of the number of papers published annually, the number of serious errors in them is increasing fast as well. It is imperative for mathematics as a profession to set higher and tougher

standards, mandating publishing errata or corrigenda for significant results whose proofs turn out to fall through or to be substantially incomplete. The AMS should lead the way here, starting with its own journals.

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Not a Fond Farewell

In response to the adoption of a fellows program, I am letting my membership in the AMS lapse, as I do not wish to be a member of an organization that is not egalitarian. The program will politicize the AMS and have ramifications for hiring, promotion, and tenure. It is only a matter of time before cries of discrimination arise, and fellows are anointed solely to achieve diversity. Adoption of this program is the most foolish thing the AMS has done since I have been a member.

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AMS Fellows

I am declining the invitation to be an AMS Fellow, and I urge others to do the same. The many harmful effects of this type of program were well explained in the August 2006 *Notices* by AMS past president David Eisenbud, who wrote, "A Fellows program goes against one of the things that makes mathematics special and wonderful: its uniquely egalitarian culture."

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