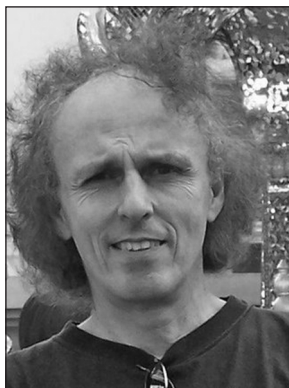# JPBM Communications Award

John Allen Paulos

The 2013 Communications Award of the Joint Policy Board for Mathematics (JPBM) was presented at the Joint Mathematics Meetings in San Diego, California, in January 2013.

The JPBM Communications Award is presented annually to reward and encourage journalists and other communicators who, on a sustained basis, bring mathematical ideas and information to nonmathematical audiences. JPBM represents the American Mathematical Society, the American Statistical Association, the Mathematical Association of America, and the Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics. The award carries a cash prize of US$1,000.

Previous recipients of the JPBM Communications Award are: James Gleick (1988), Hugh Whitemore (1990), Ivars Peterson (1991), Joel Schneider (1993), Martin Gardner (1994), Gina Kolata (1996), Philip J. Davis (1997), Constance Reid (1998), Ian Stewart (1999), John Lynch and Simon Singh (special award, 1999), Sylvia Nasar (2000), Keith J. Devlin (2001), Claire and Helaman Ferguson (2002), Robert Osserman (2003), Barry Cipra (2005), Roger Penrose (2006), Steven H. Strogatz (2007), Carl Bialik (2008), George Csicsery (2009), Marcus du Sautoy (2010), Nicolas Falacci and Cheryl Heuton (2011), and Dana Mackenzie (2012).

Citation

The 2013 JPBM Communications Award is presented to JOHN ALLEN PAULOS, professor of mathematics at Temple University. Paulos's books, columns, reviews, speeches, and editorials have for more than twenty-five years brought mathematically informed ideas, information, opinion, and humor to a broad nonspecialist audience.

One of Paulos's early books, *Innumeracy: Mathematical Illiteracy and Its Consequences* (Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, Hill and Wang Division, New York, 1988), was a *New York Times* bestseller for over four months in 1989. *A Mathematician Plays the Stock Market* (Basic Books, New York, 2003) appeared on *BusinessWeek*'s bestseller list in 2003. His many mathematical articles and reviews have appeared in *Scientific American, The Guardian, The New York Times, The Nation, The American Scholar*, and the *London Review of Books*, and his "Who's Counting" column on ABCNews.com has been running for more than a decade. He has given

talks at countless venues, ranging from the Smithsonian and the National Academy of Sciences to Harvard's Hasty Pudding Club and the *Late Show with David Letterman.*

Paulos's writings combine real-world stories, forthright opinion, and wide-ranging mathematics to entertain and inform the public, both about timely issues and about how mathematics often can and should underlie public discussion of policy.

Biographical Sketch

John Allen Paulos is a best-selling author, popular public speaker, monthly columnist for ABCNews.com, and contributor to a variety of other publications. Professor of math at Temple University in Philadelphia, he earned his Ph.D. in the subject from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is married and has two children, two grandchildren, and a dog named Shmata.

His writings include *Innumeracy* (*New York Times* bestseller for 18 weeks), *A Mathematician Reads the Newspaper* (on Random House's reader compilation of best nonfiction books), *Once Upon a Number* (chosen by the *Los Angeles Times* as one of the best books of 1998), and *A Mathematician Plays the Stock Market* (a brief tenant in 2003 on the *BusinessWeek* bestseller list). He has also written scholarly papers on mathematical logic and related areas, as well as scores of op-ed columns, book reviews, and articles in publications such as *The New York Times, Scientific American, The Wall Street Journal, Forbes, The Nation, Discover, The American Scholar*, and the *London Review of Books.*

The audiences he has addressed range from those in classrooms to members of the Smithsonian, from Harvard's Nieman Fellows to its Hasty Pudding Club, from mathematical associations to stock market forums, and from NASA and the National Academy of Sciences to college gatherings, including the commencement assembly at the University of Wisconsin. Paulos has appeared frequently on radio and television, including a four-part BBC adaptation of *A Mathematician Reads the Newspaper,* and appearances on *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer, 20/20, Larry King Live*, and the *Late Show with David Letterman.* In 2003 he received the American Association for the Advancement of Science award for promoting public understanding of science.

He has also been cited by cultural, business, and political commentators, has an extensive Web presence (including Twitter), and has even been the answer to a *Jeopardy!* question. With these curious

credentials, he served for two years on the editorial board of the *Philadelphia Daily News*, where, as with his newspaper book, ABC columns, and stint at the Columbia School of Journalism, he tried to straddle the disparate realms of Pythagoras and Pulitzer.

Response from John Allen Paulos

I'm very honored to receive the JPBM Communications Award, especially given its previous recipients and the fact that communicating mathematics is a significant part of what I do. Like many of you, I was greatly influenced by popular communicators of mathematical ideas when I was young, particularly Martin Gardner and, a bit later, Ernest Nagel on Gödel's proof. They made clear that math wasn't just about algorithms but said something about games, magic tricks, science, math itself (Gödel), and the world. Bertrand Russell was also an early influence, although *Principia Mathematica* and his purely mathematical writings were anything but easily accessible. His philosophical and popular writings, however, primed me both to appreciate what he termed the "austere beauty" of mathematics and to realize that its study did not preclude one from commenting on topical issues and might even give one an oblique perspective on them. Nevertheless, at one time or another as an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, I resolved to major in classics, English, philosophy, physics, and, of course, mathematics. Despite the brief separations and flings with the above disciplines and other topics, I gradually became more deeply enthralled with the power of mathematics and came to see it as a sort of imperialist discipline capable of invading and occupying almost every other domain.

An opportunity to further the invasion came with *Innumeracy*, and I've been doing my best to advance the occupying forces for a long time, writing about the connections between mathematics and humor, philosophy, journalism and a variety of news stories, the stock market, storytelling, and other endeavors.

Much, perhaps too much, has been written about mathematical pedagogy, and I certainly don't wish to add to it here, but there is one under-appreciated motivating factor I would like to mention. Show kids that with mathematics, some facts, and sometimes a bit of psychology they can vanquish blowhards' nonsense, no matter their age or size. For some, at least, this may be a better initial selling point than mixture problems or factoring techniques.

My communicating the charm and relevance of mathematics to a large audience has been an honor in itself, as is—I want to reiterate—recognition of my efforts by the JPBM and the mathematics community generally.

—JPBM announcement

MAA Prizes Awarded in San Diego

At the Joint Mathematics Meetings in San Diego, California, in January 2013, the Mathematical Association of America awarded several prizes.

Gung and Hu Award for Distinguished Service

The Yueh-Gin Gung and Dr. Charles Y. Hu Award for Distinguished Service to Mathematics is the most prestigious award made by the MAA. It honors distinguished contributions to mathematics and mathematical education, in one particular aspect or many, whether in a short period or over a career.

The 2013 Gung and Hu award was presented to WILLIAM A. HAWKINS JR. of the University of the District of Columbia and Director, MAA Strengthening Underrepresented Minority Mathematics Achievement (SUMMA), for his work to improve the mathematical education of underrepresented minorities and to increase their representation in the mathematical community. Since 1990 he has directed the SUMMA program. In this capacity, he has been a leader in analyzing and interpreting the current status of minorities in mathematics and in calling attention to the need for action. He has also been active in raising funds and organizing programs to bring about change.

Hawkins was one of the cochairs when the MAA Committee on Minority Participation in Mathematics was first established in the late 1980s. In 1990 he resigned from that position and took a leave from the University of the District of Columbia to become director of the then-new MAA program SUMMA. At first the MAA position was salaried through a grant from the Carnegie Corporation, but that funding ran out in the mid-1990s. Bill has continued to work, without pay, approximately half-time, directing the SUMMA program while