

# EARLY CAREER

The Early Career Section offers information and suggestions for graduate students, job seekers, early career academics of all types, and those who mentor them. Angela Gibney serves as the editor of this section. Next month's theme will be opportunities for diversity in teaching.



## Your Early Career and the Pandemic

*Angela Gibney*

How will 2021 look for mathematicians in their early career? How will these times change our community?

The job market during COVID-19 (and after) will be tough (and will likely worsen). Those of us with job security have a vested interest in doing what we can to support our junior colleagues with advice, creative job solutions, ideas for new projects, and empathy for the uncertainty they face. A growing number among us would like to make real changes in how we operate, including dealing with issues of diversity and systemic bias.

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One small step that you can take is to add your voice to the Early Career. Do you have an idea for an article? Can you help out, or do you know someone who might?

In our first two years, 100 articles have appeared in the Early Career, on topics related to research, teaching, working with students, publishing, funding, information about jobs, and the job search in business, industry, government, and in academia. We have addressed mentoring, communicating math, how stuff works, and we have presented a number of good ideas to emulate.

We'd like to take a moment to draw your attention to the people who generously contributed in our second year (their names are listed below). If you haven't had a chance, visit the AMS *Notices* Early Career Collection <http://bit.ly/21EMeHA> to read what they and the first-year authors have said.

Thank you to the contributors to year 2:

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- Chuck Weibel
- Robin Wilson
- Shelby Wilson
- Aris Winger
- Michael Young
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- David Zureick Brown

## How to Have Lunch in the Time of COVID-19

*Kristin DeVleming  
and Andrew Kobin*

Life as an early-career mathematician got a lot harder in 2020. While everyone is facing their own personal and community challenges during a global pandemic, those of us without tenure or a permanent position face an especially steep climb as the world responds to COVID-19. In the face of uncertainty, the two of us decided to focus on preserving something simple: chatting over lunch. Over an ongoing series of informal discussion panels, entitled “Lunch in the Time of Covid,” we have explored topics that affect early-career mathematicians, including the job market, police violence against Black Americans, mentoring, and staying productive as a researcher. Our intention is to build community and start conversations, some of which will last the rest of our careers. We hope to continue this series even as the world recovers from COVID-19 and have provided concrete suggestions for those of you interested in starting your own version of “Lunch.”

### How it Started

The idea for “Lunch in the Time of Covid” came from the “hallway” at a virtual conference in the early days of the pandemic, where the organizers first met and discussed the pandemic’s unique affect on early-career mathematicians. Disillusioned by the lack of voices from our generation on a Q&A panel, Kristin wrote up a list of tips for young mathematicians that spoke to the anxieties many of us were feeling at the time. Several email conversations later, we

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proposed hosting an informal discussion about these topics—a “brown bag lunch”—and with that, we set to work.

The actual format of “Lunch in the Time of Covid” has changed very little since its inception. The conversation should be informal, possibly changing topics organically according to what participants have on their minds. For each topic, we invite three “distinguished panelists” to lead the discussion and share their experiences with the audience. We often propose a few initial questions for the panelists to start with, but the discussion is largely led by questions and comments from the audience. As the conversation warms up, participants chime in with questions, offer their own experiences, share links, or just verbally encourage each other. Once you get people chatting about something they are passionate about, others feel empowered to add their voices too, and the enthusiasm compounds. In a way, this was always the primary function of these events: to provide a space for diverse voices on critical topics for our generation of mathematicians.

### What We Do

Organizing a panel—not to mention a series of panels—takes work, but if you plan things out ahead of time and remain flexible about things you cannot control, you will save yourself unnecessary work later.

Ultimately, we began with a short list of topics to discuss over lunch. We have volunteer note-takers who keep track of topics that come up and any resources that are shared during the meeting, and we save the Zoom chat from each lunch. We have also found that each discussion organically yields topics and panelists for future lunches. For example, during one lunch, participants shared the names of several impactful mentors and allies, and we were able to reach out to these people as panelists for a later lunch on allyship.

Between panels, we keep lists of future topics and potential panelists. This makes it easy to start planning events well ahead of time and match a topic to panelists that have expertise or have had an impact in that area. About two weeks out from an intended date, we invite panelists for a specific topic, and if some decline, we work down our list until we have the panel chosen. Because these are informal lunch conversations, we have been able to shift our days/times to accommodate our speakers, although this may not always be possible.

After the first lunch, Andrew created and started maintaining a website<sup>1</sup> for “Lunch in the Time of Covid,” where we share information and registration details about upcoming events, as well as the notes, links, and miscellanea from past events. This has become a great resource in its own right, featuring calls to action in the mathematics community (including a letter to the *Notices* urging the community to boycott collaboration with the police), suggestions for further reading (or listening: participants on June 19 were eager to share their favorite podcasts), and

<sup>1</sup><https://www.andrewkobin.com/lunch-in-the-time-of-covid>.