



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter to the Editor

I would like to echo the sentiments of Richard Stanley in his letter on research survey articles that appeared in the January 2022 issue of the *Notices*. It appears I am not alone in wondering who these articles are supposed to serve. On the whole, these articles seem to be well-written, and they apparently discuss important mathematics. However, they seem pitched towards individuals who are already fairly expert in the area. In many cases they assume a background that is beyond the training on many in the membership. Professor Stanley makes a good point when he mentions that papers should be understandable by someone who has passed qualifying exams, I would add in a “typical” PhD program, not just an elite one. I don’t ask to be able to understand an entire article, merely that I be able to follow the general train of thought, so that I can appreciate what’s being discussed. Good basic introductions to these articles would be a step in the right direction.

There are two main things I want to get at the beginning of an article. Why should I care about what you are going to discuss, and where does it fit in the bigger picture of the area in which you work. For those of us who got our degrees a long time ago and have spent years working in undergraduate institutions, much of what one might assume of someone who passed qualifiers might now be somewhat of a distant memory. A bit of a refresher after luring us into the article would be appreciated, indeed is probably necessary.

Many of the same remarks can be directed at the memorial articles on famous mathematicians. I read these to learn about the person behind the mathematics. It might be advisable in certain instances to have separate appreciations, one for the individual’s mathematics, another for personal remembrances. This does not preclude some mention of the mathematics, in a general way, in remembrances, just that these personal reflections should not get into the weeds of the mathematics.

*Best regards,
Francis Christian Leary,
St. Bonaventure University (retired)*

**We invite readers to submit letters to the editor at notices-letters@ams.org.*

Letter to the Editor

The president of the AMS recently asked me to serve on a prize committee. The e-mail also said that as part of my acceptance, I “attest to the following statement: I have not been the subject of a finding of professional misconduct, nor am I currently under investigation for professional misconduct.”

In general I am against forcing people to “attest” to various sweeping and ill defined claims, but let me just explain 2 concrete reasons why I could not “attest” to the literal reading of the claims.

When I was an undergraduate, I organized a student seminar. One day there was a physics professor in our seminar room. When I told him that we have the room, he said that he needs it and he is a professor so it is his. I called him something like a puffed up bully, and left. Then I was called to the dean’s office, told that my conduct was inexcusable, received a reprimand and was ordered to apologize at a physics faculty meeting. Although I was a student, I acted in the capacity of a seminar organizer, and the dean found that I committed professional misconduct. While for me this was only a joke, many fellow mathematicians from repressive countries faced charges that resulted in official “findings” and serious consequences.

I also learned recently by accident that 20 years ago my current university investigated me. I still do not know what the charges were. I also do not know whether the investigation is closed, or was put in a filing cabinet marked “Pending” and forgotten, but still officially open. From what I have heard, it is common that an accused is not told that there is an investigation, so none of us can truly “attest” that we are not “currently under investigation for professional misconduct.”

*—János Kollár
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Response from AMS Secretary Boris Hasselblatt

The AMS is implementing best practices across the board to ensure a welcoming environment for everyone. A brief conversation with the AMS Secretary can resolve any issues if you are not comfortable attesting to the required statement. We apologize and will draft some new language for invitations to help address this concern going forward.