

State of AMS April 1996

04/03/01 9:37 AM

Since I arrived at the AMS in June of last year, I've learned a lot; I have much more to learn yet. The Society is incredibly robust and healthy, having undergone a remarkable period of expansion. Here is a list of a dozen items with a brief remark about each.

- ◆ **MathSciNet:** The internet version of Math Reviews came on line on January 1, and it's a remarkable product that makes using Math Reviews a new experience. We now want to make it better: At the moment, all the bibliographic data is available, but only the reviews since 1980 are in electronic form. We hope to embark on a program to put those 90,000 pages in electronic form – it will at least two years and a lot of capital.
- ◆ **Electronic journals:** Every journal published by the AMS is now available online, over the internet. The entire collection is searchable; all references are linked to Math Reviews. Our aim is to keep improving those journals.
- ◆ **Book Program expanding:** Last year, we decreased prices and extended our reach to bookstores and the international market. Unit sales of increased substantially. The program gets better each year, but book programs expand at glacial speeds.
- ◆ **e-Math:** There is a new invigorated e-Math, organized around the policy committees who serve as editorial boards. Our services – employment information, for example, and the Combined Membership List– are heavily used. The Math on the Web section, which is maintained by Math Reviews, has become a central location to look for mathematics. We are in the process of adding a new public awareness section, for innocent nonmathematicians who accidentally stumble onto our site.
- ◆ **New Notices:** The exposition in the Notices has drawn lots of attention, and the Notices is evolving into a new kind of journal. It takes a lot work to do that, and it also takes time.
- ◆ **Rochester Task Force:** I likely don't have to say much here. Rochester was an important event. Cathleen and Arthur both worked hard for months. The Task Force is remarkable for the collection of distinguished

people *outside* mathematics who are on it. We ought to feel good about that support from outside.

- ◆ Task Force on Excellence: The Task Force continues to meet with groups of chairs, and most recently began meeting with groups of deans to talk about *their* view of mathematics departments. It's eye-opening, and the material coming out of this work will be extremely valuable.
- ◆ Washington office: Sam Rankin has given a lot of energy to the Washington office, and among other things has discovered that interacting with the *other* professional societies in Washington is a tremendously valuable activity. It gives mathematics a presence in the science community that we've never had before.
- ◆ Minority Participation Office: One of the recommendations of the Presidential Task Force on Minorities was the establishment of an office, and we are now working on ways to implement the recommendations of the Task Force. It's complicated. A proposal will come to the ECBT in May, and then the Council in August.
- ◆ Centennial Fellowships: The fellowships went to younger mathematicians this year, four of them. We hope to increase giving so that we can continue to provide that number in the future.
- ◆ Employment register: We are working on ideas to do the employment register in a way that better suits the needs of everyone. It's hard to satisfy all concerned, and we need to experiment.
- ◆ Survey work: There are many of concerns about what's going on in graduate schools or with young mathematicians. We need to collect data to find out, and we are working with various groups to see exactly what we need to know and how we can find out.

This is a small list, just to give you a flavor. The list of activities goes on and on, fed by a steady flow of new ideas from both inside and outside the AMS.

Our membership [graph] is healthy too: It's pretty steady at around 30,000. We ought to be careful, however, to realize that only about 10,000 of those

members are "ordinary" members. Many others are category-S, or reciprocal, or nominee. Nominee members are our future, but we must remember that 9,000 of our members pay no individual dues at all.

That's the good news, and there's plenty of it. Here's the bad. We are faced with a financial problem, and it won't go away by ignoring it. This year, we lost 1.5 million in revenues when the major Russian translation journals shifted elsewhere (Doklady, Steklov, Izvestia, Sbornik). It's not easy absorbing a loss of 1.5 million in a 20 million dollar budget.

That's a short-term problem, but there is an even more important long-term one. We have three main sources of revenue-- Journals, Math Reviews, and Books. [chart of revenue] Not coincidentally, those are the three first items I listed above in my sample of a dozen. Those three *make* money for the AMS; *each one of the others loses money*. Indeed, we have few activities that make money, and for two of these – journals and Math Reviews – we face an uncertain future about their ability to generate revenue.

My concern for our financial future is made worse by our success. We have expanded our activities in recent years; we are a more robust, a more energetic, and a healthier organization. But in doing all this we have raised expectations and, unfortunately, costs: We now have dozens of committees thinking creatively about new things we can do, and almost all those things cost money. I am worried that we have raised unreasonable expectations about what the Society can achieve with the resources at our disposal.

That's all bad news; now here's some good again. We face some problems, but they are not insurmountable. I've been outlining the general program in discussions with various people. Part of it is clearly my job, and the job of the staff:

- We need to protect our core sources of revenue by protecting our subscriber base. To do that, we need to stabilize subscription prices so that the products remain affordable by institutions around the world. And we need to expand the subscriber base for Math Reviews.
- We need to expand our sources of revenue by expanding our book program as well as other suitable products, for example, electronic database publishing.

- We need to cut costs of production and overhead for all activities. We have already begun, reducing staff (mainly by attrition), and we are tightening our belts, while at the same time realizing that we have to make investments in our future.

Those are all things that *we* are doing, right now. But there are two other things that *you* can do to help as well.

- We need to limit our outreach activities. Does that mean pulling back, stopping everything we've accomplished in the past few year? Absolutely not. We are a much better Society for all that activity. But we to realize that we cannot simply pass along the additional costs of an unlimited amount of outreach to our publication program; that's not sustainable. We cannot do everything that people want to do, and that means we have to set priorities and make decisions.
- We also need to limit governance costs. Governance is a modestly large portion of our "overhead". It's a necessary expense for a professional society, but again we can make sensible decisions about limiting the costs. Does a committee have to meet two times each year, or would once be enough? What's the most economical location? Are there ways to reduce travel expenses?

None of these things is a major undertaking. We don't need grand schemes right now; we need lots of little steps to move us steadily forward.

All this sounds a bit cautious, a bit pessimistic, maybe even a bit reactionary. It's not meant to be. The AMS is an extremely healthy enterprise with hundreds of members engaged in its activities and governance, and with a dedicated staff that is incredibly loyal to the organization – it's one of our most valuable assets. We are reaching out to all parts of the mathematics community and beyond – that's good. But we need to make certain we can sustain that effort in the future, not just today. And sustaining things, alas, takes money.

A Sample of Projects

- MathSciNet
- Electronic journals
- Book Program expanding

- e-Math
- New Notices
- Rochester Task Force
- Task Force on Excellence
- Washington office
- Minority Participation Office
- Centennial Fellowships
- Employment register
- New Surveys