

## Seaway Section Governor's Report – Fall 2012

I attended my first Board of Governor's meeting on August 1, 2012 at MATHFEST at Madison, Wisconsin. The meeting agenda was 197 pages long, but the meeting lasted less than eleven hours since the bulk of the agenda consisted of attachments for use at the meeting.

At a Board of Governor's Meeting, much of the work is routine – accepting recommendations from committees for awards, membership of committees, or chairmanships. One of these actions was to accept the revision to our by-laws( adding an at-large member to the executive committee). This action was unanimous (actually without any discussion at all). Elections were held to replace outgoing officers and members of various committees.

The bulk of the active work at this Board of Governor's meeting involved two issues – “Double-Blind Refereeing” and the “Fiscal Health of the MAA”.

### Double-Blind Refereeing

Doubly-masked (or double-blind) review is a practice under which neither referees nor authors are told one another's identities. Since a referee can sometimes guess the identity of an author and authors sometimes know who would logically be chosen to review their papers, it seems most practical to focus not on who knows whose identity, but on what information is conveyed to referees by editors when they request a review.

Partly as a result of the AWIS study of the proportion of prizes awarded to women by the MAA, the Council on Prizes and Awards and the Council on the Profession each passed a motion that all review for MAA journals be doubly-masked. (The CMJ already uses doubly-masked review, while the Monthly and the Magazine do not.)

At the Joint Math Meetings in January 2012, a committee was formed under the Committee on Journals to study the issue and to make recommendations. The committee report was delivered on June 14, 2012 and made the following recommendation:

“The committee finds merit in many (though not all) of the arguments on both sides of the issue. While we are fully committed to the eradication of improper bias, if bias were not operating in this context, then the move to double-blind refereeing would be a burden and not an asset. Thus we are strongly influenced by the data we examined. The clearest picture arises from single-author papers for men and women, and what is very close to equal acceptance rates for all such submissions. We have some speculations as to why double-author papers have varying acceptance rates, but given the result on single-author papers, we do not believe that this is an instance of bias. And while the acceptance rates for all-female multiple-author papers is noticeably low, there are very few papers in this category, and the acceptance of even one or two more papers would change the statistics dramatically. No member of the committee had a strong opinion either in favor of or

opposed to double-blind refereeing. On balance, our collective opinion is that absent a clear reason to adopt this policy, we find that the Monthly is well served by its current practice and recommend that it not adopt doubleblind refereeing. “

Following a very long discussion of the issue, the Board of Governor’s passed a resolution that roughly said (the actual language of the resolution is in the minutes of the meeting which are not out yet) “the MAA will move towards double-blind refereeing in all its journals. Editors and referees now serving will not be required to adhere to this policy.”

### The Fiscal Health of the MAA

For the past five years the MAA has had an operating deficit in the range of \$200K-\$300K per year. The entire operating budget is approximately \$9.5 million each year. Should these deficits continue, it would materially weaken the MAA. While the association has assets of around \$13 million, it has only about \$700,000 that is liquid and unencumbered. Michael Pearson, Executive Director of MAA made several general proposals for addressing this problem. The Board of Governors approved the general plan and awaits proposals for specific actions.

The fiscal plan calls for investment in certain initiatives to increase the revenue and effectiveness of the MAA. Specifically these are:

1. Increase both production and sales of MAA books, in both print and electronic versions, including an increased emphasis on textbooks.
2. Broaden participation in MAA’s AMC mathematical contests.
3. Begin a development effort centered on MAA’s Second Century, beginning in 2015 with its centennial.
4. Increase participation in both national and sectional meetings.
5. Improve the MAA website.

Item number 2 is particularly important since the AMC contest is one of the largest sources of revenue for the association. Presently about 375,000 students participate per year out of an eligible population of 18,000,000. Even a modest 10-15% increase in participation would help the financial situation considerably.

Item number 4 needs some explanation. It is the policy of both the MAA and AMS to run the national meetings at cost, that is, not to expect a profit. Many of the scientific societies (The American Chemical Society for example) use their national meetings as serious sources of revenue. These societies usually have much stronger connections to industry and receive much stronger support from non-academic sources. Increased attendance at meetings would shift these

meetings from small losses of revenue to small gains in revenue and would also increase the general level of membership in the association.

Specific proposals on these items are expected to be presented at the Board of Governors meeting in January 2013 in San Diego, California.

Respectfully submitted by Gary Towsley, Governor of the Seaway Section, September, 2012.