Mathematics Students Forum Agenda – November 2005

In the interest of keeping requests and comments accurate, the following agenda was composed by taking students' comments with minimal editing. In several cases, the original students' emails were included verbatim.

**PhD Special Topics Courses**

“There have been examples of students signing up for courses labeled as 'Graded as a Seminar Course,' and subsequently being reprimanded for not attending them on a regular basis. The informal agreement between students and the Math Chair (made at last spring's meeting on this issue), was that for courses labeled as 'Graded as a Seminar Course,' there would be no requirements whatsoever, including attendance requirements. Many of us would like ALL faculty to honor this (albeit informal) agreement. If faculty wish to have requirements in their special topics courses, they should not use the 'Graded as a Seminar Course' option in the course bulletin.”

“Compliments to everyone involved in the transition to the new system for the special topics courses. Special thanks for including the grading scheme (i.e. regular class, seminar, presentation) in the course descriptions, and we hope this practice is continued in future years. As for the questions:

i) Is the system having the desired effect? Namely are the special topics courses full to sufficient levels?

ii) What exactly is the policy on the number of research courses and special topics courses a post-orals student can take each semester? Are there specific numbers we should know in advance, or should it be discussed with Tamar each semester?”

**Teaching Assignments**

“It would be nice to have the teaching requirements for supported students standardized (or explained if there is a standard) and printed on the graduate program's website. For example, there could be a maximum number of semesters, perhaps 4, that one can be expected to teach class as opposed to TA. Also, it would be nice to have a clearly defined time after which one can be expected to teach, e.g., only after passing the oral exams. Instead of arbitrarily selecting students for TA jobs for which there will likely be time conflicts, perhaps let the students select the TA jobs they want from a pool of appropriate jobs, with a lottery for the more time consuming jobs.”

“I don't understand why we do team teaching and would like it explained. What are the benefits to having 3, 6 or 9 versions of the same class that are almost the same? Why not have 1 class with recitations or an open tutoring workshop for the class? Is it because the university doesn't have decent lecture halls? Or for the appearance of small class sizes? Or because a grad student shouldn't be expected to teach a large class?”
**Strike/Student-Faculty Relationship**

“I am disappointed in how the faculty handles the strike. The loudest and most powerful faculty seems to follow strictly the hard-line position of the dean (even though they like to claim otherwise). I feel like they do not whatsoever appreciate the work I invest in teaching. Maybe that is because most faculty invests very little in their own teaching. There is much more support from other faculty but either they are silent or too young to dare say anything. And I am still waiting for an explanation for why Shatah was secretly added to my Blackboard site.” [From a student who opposed the strike.]

“My comment is that the faculty treats us as subordinates rather than colleagues, and doesn't include us in any decision making processes, which I think is a mistake. I also don't want to hear a professor talk about deportation and visa status. It's irresponsible.”

**Classroom Accommodations**

i) “My graduate class is extremely crowded as the assigned room is simply not appropriate. For at least the first 3 weeks, students were forced to sit on either the radiators or the floor for the entire lecture. This was appalling. One would hope that paying $3,500+ per class would at least guarantee a seat, as in an actual desk and chair.”

ii) “There are no left handed desks available in my classroom making things less comfortable for the left handed students.”

**Introduction for New Students**

One first-year student said: “It would be great to have all the information about facilities and procedures at Courant and who to contact with questions about various things [...] compiled in one place [...]. It would also be great to have a directory of students [...]”. The editors of this agenda replied to the student pointing out the “Student Resources Page” and the existence of the Courant Directory. Perhaps the procedure of publicizing this type of information should be streamlined.

The same student also commented: “It would be great to be told in advance that I should come to New York well in advance of courses starting!”
Computing and printing

“I LOVE the new Linux boxes. They are still riddled with problems (read a CD? play a movie made with Matlab?) but they are being solved one by one and the comment people are really fast fixing things (installed Thunderbird, Adobe Acrobat and others within a day of me asking for it).”

“The new pc's are nice. Why can't we have windows? Linux still has a lot of basic problems. For instance: the built in ps/pdf viewer does not have an option for changing the default printer, or at least I couldn't find a way to so it.”

“nhp33 has been misbehaving ever since it was moved from 730 to the lobby in the 7th floor. Perhaps it would be better to replace it with a new, smaller one like the one on the 8th floor.”

“The new computers are great! Thanks! But printing services are not working well, e.g., 'lpq' doesn't give a real print queue.”