Minutes from Math Student Forum, Dec. 2002

Here’s a partial summary of what went on at the forum. Some issues are already resolved or have people working on them. Other items are unresolved. For both kinds of issues, please jump in if you feel strongly. Also, I haven’t included everything from the forum, but rather things that I thought were “highlights.” If I’ve omitted something that you think needs attention, please follow up on that.

1 Academic

Topology

The current topology course is intended more as a survey course of topology for people who want to get an idea of what the field is. However, a more intense course (similar to the one offered at Columbia) would be more useful for many of the students with purer interests... The observation was made that a greater unity in the teaching of analysis, geometry and topology within the department is necessary.

Professor Bogomolov agreed that some changes, such as a more connected system of courses and a larger course offering, are in order. If you have interest in this area, please voice it to him, Professor Spencer, and Tamar over the next month as the schedule is being made up for next year. Serious student interest could help shape the developments.

First Year Courses

A couple students have complained about a lack of explicit structure in the first year courses... Quite often, the instructor does not give a syllabus or list an “official” course text (even when these exist in the instructor’s head).

Professors are asked to give the class a basic information sheet describing the syllabus and structure of the course (grading, etc...) Of course, students should feel free to ask the professor if they have unanswered questions about a class.

Math Finance Courses

Who would be the appropriate person to give a thoughtful document with comments, compliments and criticisms about the masters in math in finance courses to?

Gabrielle, Prof. Goodman, Prof. Kohn, and/or Prof. Allen.
Foreign Language Exam

Last year, we discussed the foreign language exam, and nothing conclusive was decided. What’s up with it? Will it be removed? Will courses be offered for students?

There is not support for math students to take foreign language classes. The possibility of eliminating the foreign language exam was discussed.

Course Scheduling

The first year classes are all bunched together this year...

The department will try to consider the students in scheduling the first year classes.

Class Time

The comment was made that “2 hour classes are the worst idea in the world.” Could we at least formalize the 5 minute break in the middle?

It’s not required that professors give a mid-class break, but since it’s very helpful physically (stretch, etc...), intellectually (clarify points from the lecture), and socially (have a minute to chat with classmates), it’s requested year after year. You can always ask for one. The more students who speak up, the more likely the break, probably.

Professor Show-and-Tell

The comment came up that it should be made easier for students looking for advisors to find out what people do, possibly in a day where professors introduce their work.

The post-doc/grad student talks help expose students to the research areas of professors. Going to talks/seminars and talking one on one with professors is another natural way for students to learn more.

2 TAing, teaching

A New Prize

A prize (similar to the other awards given out by CIMS each year) for excellence in teaching would be nice encouragement for quality teaching.

This idea was received favorably. There was discussion of prizes vs. letters of commendation. Professor Tabak and Helga will work out the details.
Math Finance

*Some of the math finance courses require so much work (both for the students and the TA) that there should be two TAs.*

No TA should work more than (an average of) 10 hours/week. Talk to the professor or Tamar if there’s a problem with your assignment. There are some graders available. Again, you can talk to Tamar if it seems that there should be a grader for your class but there isn’t, and she can see if anything can be done. Also, if you want to grade for a math finance class (and are qualified to do so), please let Tamar know, if she doesn’t already.

Teaching Assignments

*Once again, there have been complaints about finding out rather late what the teaching assignments are. Moreover, some TAs were not notified that the time of their recitations had changed before classes started. It would be fantastic if assignments could be e-mailed to everybody a week before classes start.*

_Last year we spoke about having the option to receive and turn in teaching preferences by e-mail. Will this happen this year?_

They will try to notify us of our assignments by both email and hardcopy in June. Individual time and room changes are occasionially made by the university w/o the math dept being aware.

3 Computing

Printers

*The need for a list of public printers has still not been addressed.*

A list is available via the printer link at the www.cims.nyu.edu/systems website.

Mconsult

_Last year, Kai Ju Liu and Boyce Griffith volunteered to act as intermediaries between systems support and students. It was discussed whether this should be a paid position (in lieu of a teaching assignment). Well, after a year, should it?_

To make the argument that this should be a paid position, students would have to write a broad description of the proposed position with an hour log justifying a full 10 hours/week, then see Tamar or Prof. Spencer.

There is a link to Mconsult via the math webpage, under PhD students, Consultant.
PCs

There have been several requests (once again) to make PCs available to students.

PC’s will be available in 502, 512, and 624 as soon as the furniture, locks, etc... arrive (in January?).

Spam

Many students have complained of the recent quantity of spam. Some are sent to students@cims, but most seem to be sent to invalid addresses. Is there anything the system administrators can do to get rid of it?

Nothing we can do, except perhaps making students@cims a closed list (so only cims people can email it) which has pros and cons.

Speed

There have been complaints about the slowness of the Ultra-Sparcs...

We were told we need memory upgrades. We have enough to upgrade 12 machines and will try to purchase more, as funds allow. Two other possibilities are to replace some of the Ultra5’s with newer machines this spring and/or try an alternative window manager that uses less memory. Hopefully the performance issue will be resolved for all of the machines by sometime next September.

Software

It would be really nice, if a working CD player would be installed on our computers. Also, there is nothing to view mpg-movies with. Netscape 4.8 has practically no multimedia capabilities; version 6 is way too slow; Opera lacks Java; the installed Mozilla crashes within seconds. A newer Mozilla maybe? Or Netscape 7?

Unix Environment

KDE/Gnome as a desktop?

4 Student Life

Post-Doc Photo Gallery

Last year, there was talk of putting up a post-doc photo board (on the 9th floor maybe?). What happened to it?

It is on the 7th floor.
Student Bulletin Board?

Is it possible for graduate students to get a bulletin board in the lounge, or in some other high traffic common area?

One is ordered. It is slated to go on the 7th floor, by the couches.

5 Building

Furniture

Thank you for replacing some of the office furniture last summer! However, there are still complaints about chairs (both in offices and in the classrooms). Could we make it a priority to get these replaced?

Another big lot of furniture will come in next summer. Talk to Jim Wildman or Jude Ali if you have a particularly bad chair or back.

Heat

Many of the thermostats are not working properly, if at all.

Expect no miracles, but they will try to repair and/or replace things as possible. Email Jim Wildman or Jude Ali if you have broken equipment. (Note sometimes the thermostat is broken, but you can shut the heat off completely by turning off some knobs underneath, in dire straits). Also, there’s a new office for maintenance and operations that you can contact in case of broken heat, lights, etc... They are m&o.helpdesk@nyu.edu. Tell them where you are and what you want.

Windows

If the heater isn’t working properly, it would be nice to at least be able to open and close the windows at will. As an interim solution, could we have a suction thingy (for closing windows) on each floor, so that it’s accessible, even when Larry isn’t in (e.g. on weekends)?

Jim has ordered more window closers, so each floor secretary will have one and there will be one at the security desk, for off-hours.

Library

What’s the status on getting extended hours, especially on Sundays?

The hours were extended, according to the student needs/wants expressed in last year’s survey. Students expressed a desire for more evening hours, but now there
are very few people in the library after 8pm. To further extend the hours would be possible but challenging... Carol Hutchins would like more communication from the students so she has more of a sense of the demand.

6 Administration

Office Supplies and Faxes

So what kind of resources are we officially supposed to be getting from Larry? And: What is the fax policy? Would it be possibly to allow us to send faxes (even not directly work-related ones)? Maybe for a fee? Local faxes could be free, just like local phone calls.

Jim will email us this information.

Packages and Mail

Several students have commented that they are not notified when packages for them arrive. Also, mail addressed to foreign students is frequently put in the wrong boxes.

You should get a slip and email when you have a package. Email Jim if you have problems w/the mail.

Payroll

Quite a few students have had problems due to mistakes in the processing of payroll.

They were shortstaffed, but have just hired a new F/T person. Email payroll@cims or Kara Fireman if you have problems.

Need for a Complaint Channel

Students occasionally have a hard time with some of the administrative services, but don’t know where they can file complaints.

Email Jim. That’s: wildman@cims.nyu.edu.

7 Other

Master Student Support

Support from CIMS for Master’s students is felt to be minimal (not just in monetary terms).
Master’s students should feel free to speak up, individually or as a group, if they have trouble or have ideas about improving the program. Students can talk to Gabrielle or Tamar. Professor Bogomolov (the DGS) and other professors are available, too.