Minutes from Math Student Forum, Nov. 2003

Here’s a partial summary of what went on at the forum. As always, some issues are already resolved or have people working on them. Other items are unresolved. For both kinds of issues, please get involved 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

Curriculum

Some students expressed an interest in allowing for three courses per semester rather than four. Faculty defended the current system on the grounds that modifying the system would lengthen the average time it takes to finish a PhD (to 6 years) and that the “fourth course” adds breadth to one’s training. Student response questioned whether changing the system would really lengthen the PhD process, and questioned the merit of the four course system. The faculty said they will discuss the general idea of restructuring. Students would like to be included in the discussion. Paul, Jose’, and Stan would be interested in helping on a student committee re curriculum change.

Make-up Classes

Faculty are supposed to have substitutes if they’re going to miss class.

Class duration- 5 minute break

Students should feel free to mention to faculty that a mid-class break would help. Students can also mention to Professor Hausner classes in which a break would be helpful, and he can pass along the request. The idea of sending a departmental note to faculty at the beginning of the semester reminding them of the importance of the break to students was mentioned, although I’m not sure whether it was agreed to do that or not.

An aside was made, remarking that two hour classes are too long, and that meeting twice a week for hour-long classes would be better. This could be part of larger curriculum changes. Maybe.

Foreign Language Exam

Faculty discussed the issue last year and were split 50/50 about abolishing the exam. Methods of strengthening the requirement (such as offering a math class in a foreign language each semester, or having a seminar in which students read
and present on papers written in foreign languages) were discussed. Students reiterated the idea that the department should provide students the opportunity to learn a foreign language or else not expect them to know one.

2 TAing, teaching

Disparity in Teaching Assignments

Some inequalities are going to occur, but the department does try to compensate for a heavy assignment one semester with a lighter one the next. Students should speak up if they have a particularly difficult semester coming up (like right before Written or Oral exams) or if they feel that they are repeatedly given heavy assignments and deserve a break. The idea of rewarding good teaching with one of the significantly light assignments (like running a homework-help session for calculus) was suggested but not approved.

Calculus curriculum

It is experimental. We will evaluate it after it has been tried for a while.

Post-orals students not asked about their schedules

It was an oversight not to say in the assignment letter that if it conflicts with your schedule, to talk to Vikki. Please do.

Teaching award

Faculty decided that letters of commendation would be better than a single award.

3 Computing

Computer speed

The computers are still slow but the additional memory makes things bearable. There was talk of updating the network.

Waste of paper-cover sheets

Students were told, again, that the cover sheets are necessary.

Ethernet

Students asked for more access. They were told that is not a problem, if the current usage limits are inadequate.
Printer on 8th floor
Students were told that a printer can be added to the 8th floor. It was not clear when it would happen or where it would go.

Other
A suggestion was made that the students be emailed the computer services webpage again.

4 Student Life

Student Bulletin Board?
Students: Currently, the bulletin board is in a low-traffic area. Can it be moved to the lounge?
Faculty: No.
Students: Outside the lounge, on the 13th floor?
Faculty: Maybe.

5 Administration
Office supplies, fax policy
Students can get office supplies from Larry, and send academic-related faxes without charge from his office. (He’s in 905 and comes back up from dealing with the mail at about 10am.) He can charge faxes on his code. Students can also see Tamar, Gabrielle, or Ed and ask to use their code to send a fax if need be.
Students asked if they can get a written summary of the protocol about administrative things, and Ken Thompson said he would write and send one.

6 Building
Windows
There should be a window-closer with each floor secretary. There will also be one put in the 6th floor copy room and one left with the security guard, which could be used after business hours.