I know the school year has just started for most of you, but it’s not too early to start thinking about next summer! In particular, if you are thinking about going to MathFest, think about judging an MAA Undergraduate Paper Session. As you probably know, MathFest 2012 was held in Madison, WI, and the undergraduate paper sessions were a great success. Ninety undergraduate talks were given by 137 student presenters and judged by 105 volunteer judges including college and university professors, graduate students, high school teachers, and mathematical professionals from industry.

If you have never participated in judging an undergraduate talk at MathFest, I encourage you to give it a shot. The commitment is not large; most judges were scheduled for two-hour sessions and if you can’t even spare that long, the organizers can accommodate you. Thanks to the outstanding number of volunteers this year there were five judges assigned to each session, so if you had any doubts about your judgment there were lots of people to discuss it with. The judging forms are easy to fill out, with a very clear and simple rubric giving point values for each of eight categories.

Most importantly, you get to hear a lot of great student talks! The sessions are roughly divided up by mathematical topic and you don’t always get to hear talks related to your area, but this year I got a session on algebra and even got to see a talk on group theory and cryptography which made me, personally, very excited. Even when you get assigned to a session outside of your area, there are always very interesting talks and lots of opportunity to ask questions about things that you might not be familiar with. This was the fifth time I have been a judge at MathFest and so far I have not been disappointed in the experience!
Twenty of the talks were given awards sponsored by the MAA or other societies. Student winners from Indiana included

- Matthew Brems of Franklin College, who along with Alexander Wagner of Vanderbilt University won an MAA Outstanding Presentation Award for “Equal Circle Packing on a Square Flat Klein Bottle”, and
- Philip Thomas of Indiana University, who along with Kirstyn Baker of Alma College, Caitlin Graff of Idaho State University, Anthony Graves-McCleary of Vassar College, and Aashish Srinivas of Swarthmore College won an MAA Outstanding Presentation Award for “Non-Trivial Pursuit: A Game of Cops and Robbers”.

The MAA Outstanding Presentation Awards were “for students who gave especially noteworthy presentations in any area of mathematics on original or learned topics.”

On the other side of the room, six judges participated from Indiana schools, including Mic Jackson from Earlham College, Adam Coffman from IPFW, Scott Kaschner from IUPUI, Ryan Grossman and Tatum Hawkins from Ivy Tech - Terre Haute, and Josh Holden from Rose-Hulman. I hope next year you’ll join us!

(Special thanks to J. Lyn Miller, Daluss Siewert, Jennifer Bergner, and TJ Hitchman, co-organizers of the MAA Undergraduate Student Talk Sessions, MathFest 2012, and especially to Daluss Siewert for sharing information about student presenters, judges, and his write-up for MAA FOCUS magazine which I shamefully cribbed off of for this article.)

Post-script comment from the Newsletter Editor: At the annual Joint Mathematics Meetings (JMM) of the AMS and the MAA, there is an undergraduate poster session, which will also be in need of judges, and there are many other events for students and MAA members. The next JMM will be in San Diego, January 9-12, 2013.