

Oklahoma-Arkansas Section Visit, Friday–Saturday 1–2 April 2016

Jim Daniel, MAA Treasurer

Under the Section Visitor Program, I attended the meeting of the Oklahoma-Arkansas Section at the University of Central Arkansas in Conway, AR, in the gently rolling hills about 30 miles northwest of Little Rock. Local arrangements were skillfully handled by Professor Ramesh Garimella, who is the department chair and chair-elect of the Section; his efforts and those of his staff and faculty made for a smoothly operating meeting that was a delight to attend. Then-chair of the Section, Professor Amy Schachle of the University of Tulsa, was most gracious in welcoming me and in presiding over the Friday Executive Committee meeting and the Saturday business meeting.

The Section is thriving and the meeting was well attended, with 79 faculty members and 103 students preregistered plus others registering on site. MAA books were displayed throughout the meeting, although the table was not staffed; two representatives from Pearson Publishing were also on hand with materials.

The mathematical program was varied and excellent. Pre-meeting activities included a Section NExT gathering and discussion on Thursday afternoon, followed by Team Math Jeopardy with 15 teams competing. Before the talks began at 1 pm Friday there were two morning workshops—a student workshop on math circles and rational tangles and a faculty workshop on multiple pathways through mathematics in various programs of study.

Lunch Friday was split into rooms for the Section NExT, for department chairs, and for faculty sponsors; I attended the Section NExT discussion, noting that not participants were not consistent MAA members. After lunch there were six parallel sessions of talks by undergraduate students followed by another four parallel sessions of faculty talks on instruction and on applied mathematics.

I attended the 90-minute Executive Committee meeting that conflicted with the second group of parallel sessions. While also dealing with nominations for elections and with meeting-site selection, much of the meeting focused on discussing the bylaws changes to be considered at Saturday's business meeting; it was decided to proceed with the morning vote but also to consider further bylaws changes over the next year that might simplify operations. I had intended to raise the matter mentioned by last year's Section Visitor, Frank Farris, namely that the Section has a substantial cash reserve, but we had to adjourn the meeting in order to get to an invited talk (the R. B. Deal Lecture); I include my comments in that regard at the end of this report.

The Section funds two invited lectures to honor two long-time Section members who influenced many students and colleagues. Professor Thomas Milligan of the University of Central Oklahoma gave the R. B. Deal Lecture "Playing in Mathematics" Friday afternoon, while Professor Allison Henrich of Seattle University presented the N. A. Court Lecture "Knotty Games" Friday evening after the Section Banquet.

The banquet was attended by about 140 people, with a good mix of students and faculty and with Professor Garimella presiding. Awards were presented to: the three best presenters of student papers; the three top Math Jeopardy teams; the two Outstanding Arkansas Teaching Award school teachers; the three Outstanding Oklahoma Teaching Award school teachers; and the Section's Distinguished Teacher of the Year Award professor.

Saturday morning began with the business meeting, at which the actions recommended by the Executive Committee were approved; Section Governor Lisa Mantini presented the MAA slide show. There followed the students' Individual Integration Bee along with five more parallel sessions of faculty talks. The final session of the meeting was my student-oriented Section Visitor talk on actuarial careers (with a slight introduction to basic actuarial mathematics).

Because of traveling from my home outside Sacramento, I had to fly to Little Rock and drive to Conway on Thursday, and then reverse that travel on Sunday. The warm southern hospitality and the lively and well-organized meeting made for a delightful trip that was well worth the travel time.

SECTION FINANCES

Frank Farris pointed out to the Section last spring that its 12/31/2014 cash balance of nearly \$19,500 seemed large and that the Executive Committee should consider at least providing flexible support for Section officers to attend national meetings; the Section has increased such support over the past year. Still, the 12/31/2015 cash balance was just over \$21,000, indicating a net income of over \$1,500 for the year. I have some suggestions for the Executive Committee of ways to make use of the annual net income and some of the cumulative cash balance:

- Use some of the cash balance as matching funds in a fund drive to raise money to endow the R. B. Deal Lecture.
- Use some of the cash balance, perhaps as matching funds in a fund drive, to increase the funds that support the N. A. Court Lecture.
- Subsidize MAA membership for Section NExT Fellows (most current Fellows are not members).
- Fund a national NExT Fellow occasionally.
- Pay students to staff the MAA book exhibit at the Section meeting and to process orders so as to stimulate sales (of which the Section gets a percentage).