Report of the MAA Committee on Minicourses
John Riedl, November 1985

The Committee on Minicourses is charged with running minicourses at each national meeting and promoting minicourses and longer minicourses at section meetings.

A minicourse at a national meeting consists of two (or, rarely, three) presentations in some depth on a selected topic, for which an additional fee is charged. Participants must register for (and pay the usual fees for) the national meeting in addition to registering for a minicourse. Most minicourses are presented in two two-hour sessions, but several have been longer. Presenters are not paid, but may claim transportation expenses of up to $600.

Minicourses at national meetings have drawn increasingly well and the committee has organized increasing numbers of minicourses to meet the demand.

TABLE 1
MAA Minicourse Enrollments at National Meetings
Summer 1982 through Winter 1986

Summer 1982	Toronto	2 minicourses	29 paid
Winter 1983	Denver	3	74
Summer 1983	Albany	6	205
Winter 1984	Louisville	8	194
Summer 1984	Eugene	8	242
Winter 1985	Anaheim	10	417
Summer 1985	Laramie	5	154
Winter 1986	New Orleans	12	486 (as of Nov. 27)

Topics for minicourses have been selected with a view toward their utility to teachers of undergraduate mathematics. Other selection criteria include quality, timeliness, availability of presenters and estimated drawing power. Persons offering to present a minicourse are given a "Manual for Presenters..." (copy attached) which describes minicourses in general and spells out how to write a proposal. For balance, the committee solicits minicourses on topics of our choosing by approaching selected individuals.

Presenters of minicourses which were judged nigh in quality and which drew well are often asked to repeat at a future meeting. In recent years about half of the presentations have been re-runs and the other half have been unsolicited proposals and minicourses initiated by the committee in about equal numbers. The tabulation below of minicourses planned for the Winter 1986 annual meeting gives a fair impression of the diversity of topics offered.

TABLE 2
Minicourses Planned for January 1986 Annual Meeting

		Preregistered	Turned away
1.	Introduction to Actuarial Mathematics - Ellen M. Torrance, F.S.A., M&R Services	29	6
2#	Hu-Math Workshop - Wade Ellis, Jr., San Jose State College	30	26
3#	Discrete Mathematics Using Difference Equations - James Sandefur, Georgetown University	30	18
4.	Data Analysis and Regression - Paul Tukey, Susan Devlin and E. B. Fowlkes, Bell Communications Research	36	--
5#	Microcomputer Software for Teaching Linear Algebra and Calculus - David Smith, Duke University	30	21
6.	Discrete Algorithmic Mathematics - Stephen Maurer, Swarthmore College and Alfred P. Sloan Foundation	81	41
7.	Introductory Computer Science - J. Arthur Seebach, St. Olaf College	45	--
8.	Teaching Experiential Applied Math - James Choike and Marvin Keener, Oklahoma State University	40	--

TABLE 2 (continued)

	Preregistered	Turned away
9# Introduction to Computer Graphics - Joan Wyzkoski, Fairfield University	30	21
10# Computing in Undergraduate Linear Algebra - Eugene Herman, Grinnell College	30	18
11. Teaching of Applied Mathematics - Gilbert Strang, Massachusetts, Institute of Technology	75	--
12# PROLOG - Fred Hoffman. Florida Atlantic University	30	15

#These minicourses make use of microcomputers.

Registration and payment has been conducted in several different ways. Initially registration fees were returned to the AMS with meeting registration. Problems ensued when courses were oversubscribed and money had to be refunded. The second attempt was pre-registration on the joint meeting pre-registration form, confirmed by payment at the meeting. Long lines resulted and also significant numbers of pre-registrants failed to follow through. The present pattern is. pre-registration and payment mailed directly to the MAA at the time of pre-registration for the national meeting. It seems to work satisfactorily. MAA staff members check at the door to ensure that only paid registrants are admitted.

Income and Expenses. Fees are paid directly to the MAA which also handles disbursements, notably for travel of presenters, equipment rental and set-up costs, and costs of duplicating notes. The MAA staff does not appear to keep separate accounts of minicourse income and expenditures. A simplified budget model might write off room fees, and set-up costs against the fee for the annual meeting (i.e., treat mini-courses as invited addresses by unpaid speakers) and charge against the minicourse fee the direct cost of computer rental and travel reimbursement. The income from the New Orleans meeting may be estimated from the pre-registrations given in Table 2 as $13,950 (180 registrations in courses involving microcomputers at $35 each, plus 306 registrations in other courses at $25 each). The direct costs may be estimated at $4,800 (twelve presenters at an average travel cost of $400). The fact that all courses are well subscribed while IBM is loaning microcomputers to the MAA at no cost makes the New Orleans budgetary situation an unusually favorable one. Comparable numbers for Laramie would be $4,450 income and $2,000 expenses.

MAA Section meetings do sometimes include short courses or minicourses, but the minicourse committee has had relatively little direct involve- ment with these. An offer made at the section officers' meeting (copy attached) resulted in three inquiries about format and possible speakers and no requests for financial help.