

## A Student at the Board Meeting

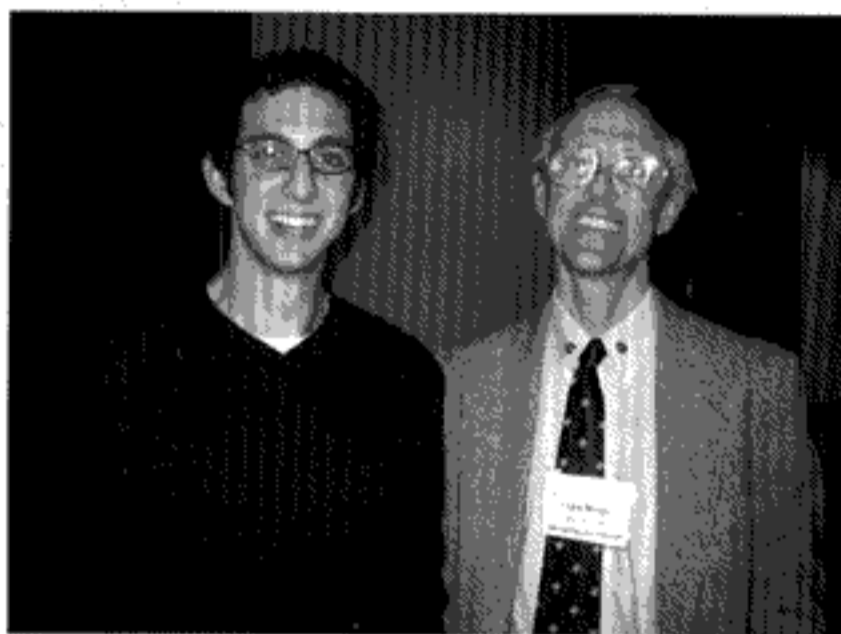
By Joshua Cooper

This past January, I was invited to attend the MAA Board of Governors Meeting at the 2002 Joint Mathematics Meeting in San Diego as a graduate student guest. I arrived knowing little about the MAA and its functions, and so did not know what to expect during the next eight hours. In the end, I was impressed with the support that the MAA provides for the needs of a very broadly defined mathematical community, and enjoyed speaking with the endless blitz of Governors, Officers, and staff I met throughout the day.

The meeting began with a few minutes of announcements and formal procedure, after which a discussion began almost immediately over the location of MathFest 2005. Associate Secretary James Tattersall communicated the Site Selection Subcommittee's somewhat unexpected choice: Albuquerque, NM. Air-conditioned dorms, ample meeting facilities, and beautiful local geography were all suggested as clear arguments for the desirability of the locale. However, several Governors expressed concerns about the remoteness of Albuquerque as a possible risk to having large attendance, and thus also a possible financial risk. A surprisingly organized debate ensued, given the large number of people involved. In the end, the motion to approve passed when it became clear that most of the voting Board did not believe accessibility to be a significant problem under the circumstances.

A few hours later, two recommendations concerning the implementation of MAA Science Policy positions were presented to the Board. The debate that followed centered largely around one issue: what the role of MAA members is with respect to positions taken by the organization that represents them. Should members be encouraged more strongly to pursue local and state government in expressing

their opinions on Science Policy, as a complementary approach to lobbying by the national MAA? A number of Board members weighed in on whether such tactics could generate enough pressure to be truly effective in changing government policy. I found myself drawn especially to an alternative line of argument



Joshua Cooper and Frank Morgan at the Board of Governor's Meeting. Photo by Gerald J. Porter.

brought up in response: that through education and discussion, membership can be encouraged to become more involved in the relationship between their government and their needs and wants as mathematicians. A broad, multifaceted approach to stimulating political pressure could well be worth the extra energies spent educating members about policy issues of concern to the MAA.

Other highlights of the meeting included an emotional final report by Treasurer Gerald Porter, stepping down after 18 years of service to the MAA; the passing of a motion to make *Math Horizons* as well as FOCUS available free with MAA membership to undergraduates; the presentation of a number of interesting new publications, with accompanying anecdotes and plans for the future; and a relaxed lunch-time discussion with several interesting individuals from highly disparate corners of the MAA's sphere.

The experience afforded me the opportunity to reflect on the role of the MAA in the mathematics community, and, in particular, on its role in *graduate students'* lives. My conversations with several Board members confirmed my understanding that graduate students and teaching assistants generally know very little about the MAA. I find this lack of involvement rather unfortunate, since the MAA could benefit greatly from more visibility in the graduate student and teaching assistant portions of the mathematics community. Greater graduate student participation would translate into increased long-term prospects for membership and a broader population to draw upon for participation in MAA programs and events. More concretely, the goals of the MAA to support mathematical teaching at all levels are certainly directly related to the needs of teaching assistants. Ideas I discussed with a number of very receptive Board members included web-based teaching materials

available for T.A. training workshops at the local university level; increased programming geared towards graduate students at MathFest; and more aggressive advertising of events and services to new graduate students when they begin school each year.

My attendance at the meeting was an occasion I will not soon forget. I am pleased to report that the meeting ended with a vote to regularize the invitation of a student to Board of Governors Meetings, as I had been invited to this one. I hope that this small change is just a part of the forging of a new and stronger tie between graduate students and the MAA — as I believe both would benefit greatly from a closer relationship. Certainly, *my* relationship with the MAA began on a very positive note, and I thank Frank Morgan and the Board for having me there. ■

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