

Rochester Math Program Survives

There was rejoicing this week in the U.S. mathematics community upon receiving some good news: The math graduate program at the University of Rochester in New York, slated for demolition as part of a retrenchment plan, will be spared after all.

Rochester announced last November that it was shutting down its math graduate program as part of an effort to save money and trim departments not measuring up to the highest standards. Tenured slots were to shrink from 21 to 10, and nontenured Ph.D.s were to be hired to teach undergraduate courses. Officials explained that the department was not all that distinguished, its links with other departments were poor, and undergrad instruction was

"less than optimal" (*Science*, 19 January, p. 284).

Alarmed, the American Mathematical Society (AMS) swung into action, appointing a task force to look into the matter. The AMS also alerted scientists around the country, who in turn flooded Rochester President Thomas Jackson with about 200 letters expressing their dismay. The math

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lobby argued that it's inconceivable for a prominent research university not to have a graduate math department.

Meanwhile, the math department has been engaged in self-reform, issuing a report in late January titled "Meliora Mathematica" in which it laid out a plan to address the university's concerns. And on 28 March, Jackson

announced that an agreement had been reached. The number of tenured faculty will be held at 15, and the Department of Physics and Astronomy will subsidize two joint professorships. Signaling that a new era has begun, prominent algebraic topologist Douglas Ravenel will replace Joseph Neisendorfer as department chair.

University Provost Charles Phelps says "we believe all of our concerns have been met. ... We [now] have a stronger program." Phelps says outside scientists didn't influence the decision. But Harvard's Arthur Jaffe, head of the AMS task force, believes the whole exercise has been an "unprecedented" boost for mathematics. "We've never had a public articulation of broad-based support from scientists for mathematics to this extent," he says.

Congressman Blasts NASA "Slush Fund"

The environmental monitoring system that the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) wants to build is again in hot water with Congress, and its budget could soon be under investigation. Representative James Sensenbrenner (R-WI), chair of the House Science Committee panel that oversees NASA, intends to ask the General Accounting Office (GAO) to study what he says could be a \$653 million "slush fund" in the agency's Mission to Planet Earth account, which includes the Earth Observing System satellite program.

Sensenbrenner said at a 28 March hearing that NASA has failed to spend almost half the \$1.3 billion 1995 budget for the program. "Carrying half of a \$1.3 billion annual budget forward is unheard of," he told NASA chief Daniel Goldin. "I expect to ask GAO for a full and complete investigation." He added that the carry-over has taken place "despite criticism that we woefully underfunded Mission to Planet Earth ... in our effort to protect space science." NASA officials promised their cooperation.

NASA spokesperson Doug Isbell says the agency hasn't yet spent the funds because it is reshaping the program in response to recent reviews. The balance "is not a secret," he says. "There is not a slush fund."

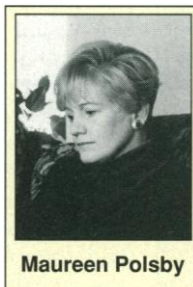
NIH Discrimination Case Thrown Out

A long-running sex discrimination case against the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) may have come to a close last week when a U.S. district judge ruled against former National Institutes of Health (NIH) neurologist Maureen Polsby.

Polsby had argued that while she was a research fellow at what is now the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke from 1983 to 1985, her adviser denied her a third fellowship year and mentoring opportunities because she had refused to have sex with him. Over the years, her case has drawn attention from Congress and HHS's Office of Research Integrity, which decided not to investigate allegations by Polsby that colleagues at NIH stole her research on torticollis disease.

Judge Deborah K. Chasanow of the U.S. District Court in Baltimore found no basis for Polsby's claims. She found that Polsby had received mentoring and that there was no evidence that she was the victim of intentional sex discrimination or

that her research was stolen. And while the judge faulted some aspects of the defense's presentation, she came down harder on Polsby's version of events, saying her account of the alleged sexual incident in particular was "concocted" to "give spice" to Polsby's charges of discrimination. In a separate decision, Chasanow also threw out another high-profile sex discrimi-



Maureen Polsby

nation case brought by former NIH psychiatrist Margaret Jensvold that had been retried because of a procedural error.

Polsby may file an appeal within 60 days, and she told *Science* that she is "definitely planning" to do so. But HHS attorney Kathleen McDermott predicts it won't be easy to overturn what she calls a "wonderfully well-crafted" decision.

Contract Dispute Slows MEDLINE Listings to a Trickle

Officials at the National Library of Medicine (NLM) have discovered there's a computer problem that may be worse than GIGO, garbage in, garbage out: NINO, nothing in, nothing out.

Since 26 February, NLM has not been allowed to use the services of a contractor who typically inputs the titles and abstracts of articles from the 3700 journals listed in MEDLINE, NLM's on-line research database. Why? Because the work has been put on hold by the General Services Administration's (GSA's) Board of Contract Appeals, which decided to review a complaint by General Graphics Services, the firm that lost out in January to Atlis Publishing Services for the NLM data-entry contract. Until GSA determines whether the contract was properly awarded, NLM

can't use Atlis's services. Citations have been piling up at the rate of about 1700 per day, and as of 25 March there was a backlog of 30,000 unlisted articles.

As a stopgap measure, NLM Director Donald Lindberg has asked all NLM staffers with access to a computer terminal to enter as many references as they can each day to help stem the rising tide of data. Lindberg has also arranged with the publishers of some 60 journals (including the *New England Journal of Medicine* and *Science*) to provide their abstracts in machine-readable form. Lindberg says he expects to hear later this month whether GSA will grant General Graphics Services' request to reopen bidding on the contract. Should that happen, the current backlog would seem like nothing compared to the deluge to come.