Reflections of TIME

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On Friday, November 18, 2005, TIME 2000 hosted its fourth annual conference, Celebrating Mathematics Teaching. A record-breaking attendance of more than 300 high school students, 20 teachers, 80 undergraduate students and 15 college faculty members, was inspired by the keynote address delivered by Cathy Seeley, President of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM).

President Seeley has been a mathematics educator for over 30 years, and has helped children throughout the country as well as in Africa’s Burkina Faso. During her presentation, titled “Teaching Math in a Flattening World—How You Can Make A Difference,” she shared her teaching experiences and even some of her lessons. President Seeley stressed that students need to learn to create, innovate, question, connect, relate, and reason; mathematics does just that. She emphasized that education is the most important profession in this world. Mrs. Seeley explained that a math teacher must have a deep understanding of mathematics and knowledge of learning and teaching. One must be willing to keep on learning and try new things. We were fortunate to have the opportunity to speak with the President of a national organization.

In addition to the keynote, students attended two of the thirteen mathematics workshops offered. Cherelse Pemberton, a teacher at Long Beach High School, lead a presentation titled “Having Fun with Parabolas.” She began by demonstrating that hitting a tennis ball into the air creates an upside down parabola. By relating mathematics to real life, Mrs. Pemberton instantly captured the attention of her students.

Edna Broukhim, a teacher at Baldwin High School, and Lena Grillo, a teacher at MacArthur High School, both TIME 2000 teachers, talked about the concepts related to Pascal’s triangle through their lesson “It’s Chaotic!” Students who at first had no idea what they were doing, observed the palindromic pattern of Pascal’s triangle in poems and music. The visiting high school students were interested to learn that Pascal’s triangle is also related to Sierpinski’s triangle, which is demonstrated by the chaos game. After the lesson, they advised TIME 2000 students that the first year of teaching will be tough and that you need to manage your time and put passion into all of your lessons.

Other presentations were given by: John Chen, Ellen Fee, Gene Elyshinsky, Irina Kimyagarov, Ron Nande, Rocío Saboito, Jacqueline Seemamane, Mark Saul, Frank Signorelli, and Susan Sadowski.

After the presentations and lunch, everyone gathered in the auditorium for a questions and answer panel moderated by Shat Eng (Senior). The panel consisted of Julio (Senior), Samantha (Junior), Randall (Sophomore), Ricky (Sophomore), Sarah (Sophomore), and TIME 2000 graduate, John Chae (FL). The panel discussion was motivating because the students were able to ask questions and openly express their interest in mathematics education. One high school student said, “I’ve never considered a career in math education but I will say the conference has changed my view. I think I can learn to love math instead of just liking it. Like Cathy Seeley said, math is like game, an art, and science and I was able to see that today.” Another student simply proclaimed, “Math is great! The TIME 2000 would like to thank the Jim and Marilyn Simons Foundation for sponsoring the conference. We hope that their generosity will continue so that more High School students can experience this exciting mathematical experience.

Lena Grillo, Edna Broukhim, Rocío Saboito, Jacqueline Seemamane

Photographed by Missi Sisson

Have you met Dr. Fem Sisser?

By Kassey Luchan

As a TIME 2000 student, you will be fortunate to have a math class taught by Dr. Fem Sisser. Dr. Sisser has always had a love for mathematics and for helping others, which led her to become a successful mathematics teacher at Queens College. By the age of 20, she had already achieved many extraordinary feats; she graduated from Queens College, received her masters from Columbia University in Mathematical Statistics, named a classmate, began the pursuit of her doctorate and started on her illustrious teaching career at Queens College. Last year, she received the 35 Year Service Award.

At Queens College, Dr. Sisser has taught Introduction to Probability and Mathematical Statistics (M241), Linear Programming and Game Theory (M247), and Nonlinear Programming (M248) and calculus classes. She taught these classes with such proficiency that by the age of 25, she was selected for the Inaugural CUNY Award for Excellence in Teaching from the Board of Higher Education. At 27, she received her doctorate, also from Columbia, in Operations Research. Her research deals mainly with nonlinear programming and its connection to interval analysis.

Recently, she has added Math 242, Methods of Mathematical Statistics, to her teaching repertoire. This class was created at the request of Dr. Artzt to better prepare TIME 2000 students to teach courses such as AP Statistics.

Although Dr. Sisser is not currently teaching calculus courses, she was videotaped teaching all of her pre-calculus lessons and many of her calculus lessons. These tapes are available in the Math Lab so that all students, not only the students in her classes, can benefit from her instruction.

Because of her desire to help all students and make a difference in their lives, during the winter and summer breaks, Dr. Sisser offers special mathematics immersion courses to prepare students to retake the CUNY Assessment Test. She finds these classes very rewarding because those students need her the most. She helps these students achieve their first success in mathematics, a subject that they may have previously struggled due to their difficulties with the subject.

Dr. Sisser’s desire to assist students extends past the field of mathematics. She is a member of the Queens College Pre-Med Advisory Committee. As the mother of two physicians, she uses her experience to help students who want to become doctors with the difficult application process.

Dr. Sisser received teaching awards from the Queens College Alumni Association and the Golden Key Honor Society. She is also serving as a member of the College’s Committee on Honors Awards, as Faculty Advisor for the Math Honor Society and as Chair of the student selection committee of Phi Beta Kappa. Because of her accomplishments, Dr. Sisser has been offered opportunities to work in administrative positions. But, she has turned them down, preferring to be in the classroom. She enjoys the interaction she has with her students, enhanced by the fact that QC does not hold its math courses in large lecture sections.

Outside of the academic world, Dr. Sisser loves spending time with her grandchildren. She believes she has become a “cooler grandmother” due to her students and her experiences interacting with them. She also enjoys reading and traveling. She has been around the United States, traveling to Hawaii and Yellowstone National Park, saying it “compares to nothing else.”

As for future mathematics teachers, Dr. Sisser offers a few words of advice: “Never overestimate the background of your audience; keep your
**Voices from the Field**

**By Vidya Sriprasad (T-4)**

This is the body of a letter that I wrote to Ms. Weinman recently. I shared my experiences as a first year teacher. I also included a story that happened to me when I was a student in TIME 2000.

**Teaching is very exciting.** Everyday I learn something new and my students, I feel so lucky because they know so much and it's very refreshing. They bring knowledge that they learn from the news into the classroom. We discuss politics, economics, and government issues. Sometimes I feel like I am teaching social studies. My students can be pretty funny sometimes too. I have students telling me that sequences are decorations that make a shirt shiny. It's hard to be a teacher and a student simultaneously. It seems that every weekend I am sick. I can't help it. Everyday there is a student that comes into the classroom sick with a cold. One of the teachers tells me that since I am a new teacher I have not yet built up a strong defense system.

I have a lot of help from people in the school in which I'm teaching. The principal is always surprising me by coming in the classroom to observe my performance. She is constantly giving me advice on anything that I can improve. I also have a mentor who comes in once a week. We talk about anything and everything, from bulletin boards to retirement down the road. I am also fortunate to have a math coach helping me through my first year. She helps me with the classroom library and makes sure that the room is student oriented, such as having the bulletin boards and the word wall filled with students' work. Then I have my co-worker, who is also a 6th grade teacher, who gives me pointers on classroom management and classroom procedures. Overall, I have a lot of help. I feel that with all of the hard work I completed in the TIME 2000 program and in my life thus far, I have reached and accomplished my dream of becoming a teacher. My new dream is to become a better teacher.

As a graduate of the TIME 2000 program, I would like to share an experience I had as an undergraduate. When I was a junior, I took High School Math from an Advanced Standpoint (M3BSW) with Dr. Artz. The structure of the class was unusual because Dr. Artz wasn't the teacher of the class, the students were. She put us into groups (what a surprise!) of five to six people. Each group was assigned a topic in math, and had to thoroughly learn the concepts, plan a lesson, and finally teach it to the rest of the class. All the while we had to put together a very large portfolio, which was grouped with David, Annie, Isaac, Chana and Shanya. The day before it was due, my work and Shanya's work got erased! We frantically worked together to rewrite two-fifths of the portfolio. We missed class, hoping that they would be able to get it back. When Dr. Artz found out what we were doing, she was furious. She wasn't angry because we didn't have a portfolio to hand in, but because we decided to all miss class (six people missing out of twenty-four, not exactly subtle) and the group that was giving a presentation that day, lost a lot of their audience. This group had worked just as hard as we did to put together their lesson. They needed our participation. We had deserted them because we didn't want to be penalized for submitting our portfolio late.

On that day, I learned a very valuable lesson. Your grades and all of your hard work will not be as important as the relationships with friends, classmates, and professors, even long after you graduate. My fellow graduates, Annie, Chana, Marie, and I keep in close contact. We share a lot of stories about our students and our colleagues. We find comfort in each other because we are all in the same situation. If there is any advice I can give you on how to get through your four years of college and TIME 2000, it is to stick by your friends. Never take your relationships with your classmates and your professors for granted. Keep in touch with each other during the holidays and the summertime, even after you graduate. Believe me, all the things I ever accomplished would not mean as much if I didn't accomplish them with my friends and professors from TIME 2000.

(Editors Note: Congratulations to Vidya and her fiancé David Chow (T-4) on their engagement!)