

PRESS RELEASE
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MATH INSTITUTE MAKES A DIFFERENCE AND WINS NATIONAL AWARD
MSRI Honored for Achievements in Encouraging Women and Minorities in Mathematics

BERKELEY, California – The American Mathematical Society (AMS) announced today that the Mathematical Sciences Research Institute (MSRI), in Berkeley, has received the “Mathematics Programs that Make a Difference” award for its outstanding efforts in increasing the participation of women and members of underrepresented minority groups in the mathematical sciences. The annual award recognizes programs and institutions that have developed successful, replicable methods for increasing participation of these groups in the field. MSRI is honored with the 2012 award for its “high level of commitment and successful efforts to improve diversity in the profession of mathematics in the United States.”

Jeffrey Vaaler, professor of mathematics at the University of Texas at Austin and chair of the selection committee for the award, said, “MSRI has a distinguished record as a leader in promoting diversity in the mathematical professions. All of us who work in mathematics benefit from their efforts. In my opinion, recognition for MSRI is long overdue.”

“MSRI is honored to be recognized by the AMS for the Institute’s impact on the mathematics profession through our efforts to encourage the participation of minorities and women in MSRI programs,” said Robert Bryant, Director of MSRI. “Increasing diversity is an important part of the Institute’s mission to develop the human potential within the mathematics community at all levels—from math education in schools to postdoctoral fellows and senior scientists.”

As one of the world’s largest and most active mathematics research institutes, MSRI organizes and hosts semester-long programs and workshops at the cutting edge of the mathematical sciences. But the Institute has also excelled as a leader in promoting diversity in the mathematical sciences. In 1992, MSRI was the first math institute to establish a human resources committee to help reach out to those groups historically underrepresented in mathematics. By devoting serious attention and resources to diversity issues, MSRI has not only made a difference with the programs and events it has organized, but has also sent a powerful signal within the mathematical community that these issues matter.

In cooperation with other U.S.-based math institutes, MSRI has played a role in establishing several activities aimed at groups underrepresented in mathematics. One of these is the Conference for African-American researchers in the Mathematical Sciences (CAARMS). This was first established at a meeting at MSRI in January, 1995, between distinguished minority mathematicians, several of them members of MSRI’s Human Resources Advisory Committee (HRAC), and then-Director of MSRI Bill Thurston, who volunteered to have MSRI host the first conference that year. Nowadays, CAARMS meets annually at prominent institutions around the country and showcases current mathematical sciences research done primarily, though not exclusively, by African Americans. CAARMS 10 returned to MSRI in 2004 to celebrate a decade of success.

Another highly successful and visible event is the biennial Blackwell-Tapia Conference, which is named after the late African-American statistician David Blackwell and the Hispanic mathematician Richard Tapia. This conference is designed to inform the next generation of students about career opportunities in mathematics and to provide a chance for them to network with other students and with mathematical scientists who play a leadership role in their communities. It was founded at Cornell in 2000 by Carlos Castillo-Chavez, then a member of MSRI’s HRAC. At the suggestion of David Eisenbud, then-Director of MSRI, the Blackwell-Tapia Prize was added as a centerpiece for the second conference, hosted by MSRI in 2002. This award honors a mathematical scientist who has contributed significantly to his or her field of expertise and who has made efforts to address the underrepresentation of minorities in mathematics. MSRI continues to serve on the Blackwell-Tapia prize selection committee.

MSRI started its Modern Mathematics Workshops so that organizers of upcoming MSRI research programs could introduce those fields with the aim of sparking the interest of mathematicians and students from underrepresented minorities and encouraging them to come to MSRI as participants in those programs. Today the workshop is held just prior to the annual conference of SACNAS, the Society for the Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science, and all of the U.S.-based mathematics institutes are involved. Recently, MSRI played a key role developing a collaboration among eight mathematics institutes to run a coordinated series of workshops related to mathematics and diversity, which are funded by the National Science Foundation.

In addition to the conferences and workshops that occur on a regular basis, MSRI has organized various one-off events that put the spotlight on diversity issues. One of the most important of these was Promoting Diversity at the Graduate Level in Mathematics: a National Forum, held in October, 2008. The purpose of the forum was to stimulate, identify, and disseminate successful models that improve retention of underrepresented groups in graduate programs in mathematics. An article about the forum, "Revisiting the Question of Diversity: Faculties and Ph.D. Programs," by H. G. Grundman, appeared in the October, 2009, issue of the *AMS Notices* (<http://www.ams.org/notices/200909/rtx090901115p.pdf>).

Along with its efforts aimed specifically at minorities underrepresented in mathematics, MSRI also has devoted attention to encouraging women in mathematics. In 2005, the Institute inaugurated a series of two-day workshops called Connections for Women, and one of these begins each MSRI research program. MSRI has also pursued strategies to encourage women to attend its graduate summer schools, thereby maintaining female representation of 30 percent in those schools, a figure that is in line with the proportion of women receiving PhDs in mathematics in the United States.

The MSRI Undergraduate Program, called MSRI-UP for short, aims to identify and mentor talented students, especially those from underrepresented groups, who are interested in mathematics. Since its inception in 2007, MSRI-UP has reached over 80 minority students and will likely have a significant impact on the face of the mathematics profession in the future.

By putting its prestige and expertise at the service of groups underrepresented in mathematics, MSRI has helped to make the mathematical community more stimulating and diverse, one that welcomes a wide range of individuals and helps them participate and thrive.

Find out more about this and other AMS awards at <http://www.ams.org/prizes-awards>.

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About the AMS: Founded in 1888 to further mathematical research and scholarship, today the more than 30,000 member American Mathematical Society fulfills its mission through programs and services that promote mathematical research and its uses, strengthen mathematical education, and foster awareness and appreciation of mathematics and its connections to other disciplines and to everyday life. The headquarters of the AMS is based in Providence, Rhode Island.

About MSRI: The Mathematical Sciences Research Institute (MSRI, <http://www.msri.org>), in Berkeley, California, is one of the world's preeminent centers for research in the mathematical sciences and has been advancing mathematical research through workshops and conferences since its founding as an independent institute in 1982. Approximately 2,000 mathematicians visit the MSRI each year, and the Institute hosts about 85 leading researchers at any given time for stays of up to one academic year. The Institute has been funded primarily by the National Science Foundation with additional support from other government agencies, private foundations, corporations, individual donors, and 90 academic institutions. MSRI is involved in K-12 math education through its annual "Critical Issues in Mathematics Education" conferences for educators, math circles, math festivals, the National Association for Math Circles (NAMC) and its website (<http://www.mathcircles.org>), and Olympiad math competitions, in undergraduate education through its MSRI-UP program, and in public education through its "Conversations" series of public events.