

What is Mathematical Research?

Engineering & Science Seminar
University of Detroit Mercy

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Disclaimer: This talk was constructed with an undergraduate/graduate student in mind who is curious about Mathematics.

Outline

- 1 Mathematical research
 - What is mathematical research?
 - What are some famous open mathematical problems?
 - Some statistics about mathematical research
- 2 How does mathematical research work?
 - What does it take?
 - What is the peer-review process?
 - How much work does it take?
- 3 Sabbatical year overview
 - What are the applications?

What is Mathematical research?

- Mathematical research is the quest to prove new theorems
- These new theorems are about Mathematical objects, their properties and relations.
- E.g. Pythagorean Theorem is about right triangles. If a, b are the right sides of a right triangle and c is the hypotenuse, then

$$a^2 + b^2 = c^2.$$

- A collection of theorems that refer to the same Mathematical object is called a *theory*. E.g. Graph Theory, Group Theory, Set Theory etc.

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- The first people to prove theorems were the Ancient Greeks.
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- It is still just as “fresh” and relevant today as it was in the days of Pythagoras.
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But what is left to be proved? Isn't it all done already?

Answer No, it is not all done. Maybe low-level Mathematics has all been worked out. But as you transition to higher-level Mathematics, you encounter *open problems*.

Open problems are problems which none has ever solved before.

If a problem is open, but people believe it to be true, this is called a *conjecture*.

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Answer The most famous open mathematical problems are the Millennium Problems of the Clay Mathematics Institute. This is a list of 6 problems the solution of each one of them will result in a \$1,000,000 award.

- P versus NP
- Hodge conjecture
- Riemann hypothesis
- Yang-Mills existence and mass gap
- Navier-Stokes existence and smoothness
- Birch and Swinnerton-Dyer conjecture

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Some Statistics

- Every year in the US alone there are about 2,000 Ph.D.s awarded in Mathematics, including about 500 – 600 Ph.D.s in Statistics and Biostatistics.
- About 34% of these Ph.D. holders starts working for the Industry, 5% for the Government, and the rest for the Academia.
- Depending on the position, many of these Ph.D. holders engage in Mathematical research.
- So, there is a whole “army” of Mathematicians that ranks in the ten of thousands that engage in Mathematical Research.
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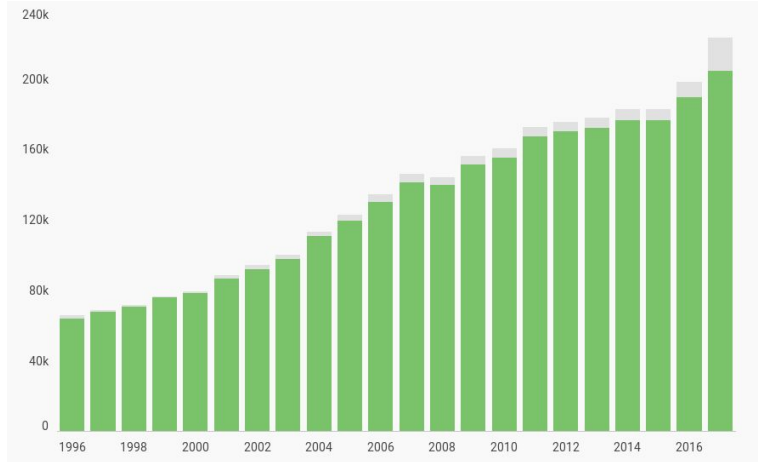
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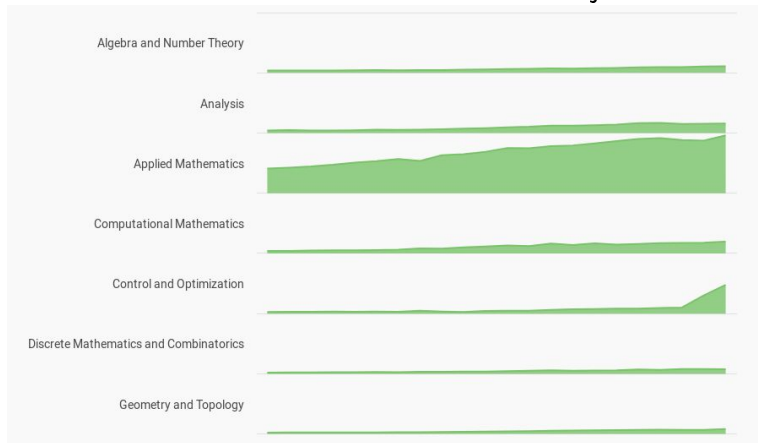
Some More Statistics

Annual Publications in Mathematics



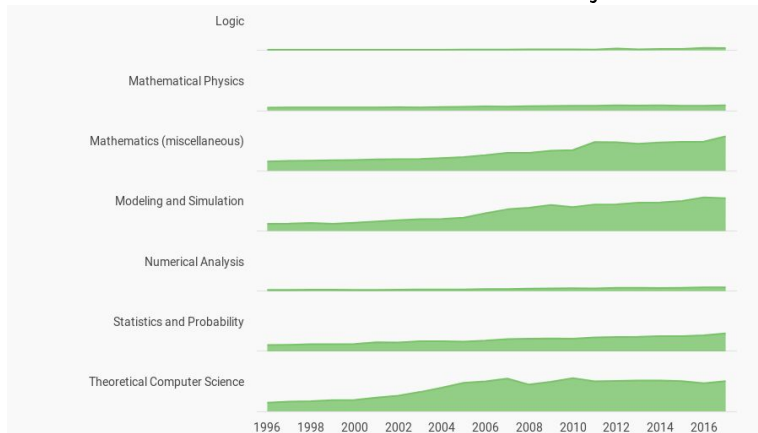
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Annual Publications in Mathematics Per Subject- 1



Some More Statistics

Annual Publications in Mathematics Per Subject- 2



How does mathematical research work?

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- If you prove a theorem that is already known, you get no credit.
- So, the first step is to identify one or more open problems.

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Second Step

- The second and most important step is to come up with some promising ideas.
- There is no guarantee that your ideas will work, or that you will have any ideas at all.
- You may spend a whole year and get no ideas.
- Or you may spend a month and come up with many fruitful ideas.
- Or you may end up solving a different open problem than you thought.
- Mathematicians are like poets in this regard. You never know what you will get.

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Further Steps

- Then you implement your ideas and you see if they work.
- Most of the times the ideas do not work!
- But hopefully get some insight on why they do not work and you modify the original ideas so as to make them work.
- You repeat the process multiple times.
- Usually this happens in conjunction to further looking the literature and/or asking colleagues for help.
- After several months and after several attempts, if everything goes well, you have a result that is interesting enough and which deserves to be published. But again there are no guarantees.

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Journal Submission

- The next step is to write down the result in a way that is clear and which proves beyond **any doubt** that the result is true.
- The manuscript is then submitted to a journal to be considered for publication.
- The manuscript is assigned to a Mathematician (or two) who is familiar with the problem you are solving.
- This person is called the *referee* and referee's job is to verify the validity of your proposed proof.

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Peer-Review Process

- Usually the referee comes back to the author with questions or requests for revision. This may repeat multiple times.
- Once the referee is satisfied the manuscript can be published.
- If the referee is not satisfied, the manuscript gets rejected and you have to start all over again.
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What does it take?

- Mathematicians work based on their knowledge of Mathematics, their experience and on their critical thinking skills.
- Some Mathematicians may also use computers for calculations.
- There is no step-by-step instruction on how to solve open problems.
- You analyze, synthesize, apply, evaluate, create etc. in any way you deem appropriate.
- Did I say there is no guarantee?
- One day you think you solved a hard problem. The next day you realize that your idea does not work.
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How long does it take?

- How long before you can submit a manuscript for publication varies a lot by person and by manuscript.
- I personally need about 1000 hours of work to conceive a project, work on it, write the results and submit for publication in a good journal.
- This is approximately 4-6 months of full-time work.
- After you submit you have to wait around 6 months before you hear back from the referee.
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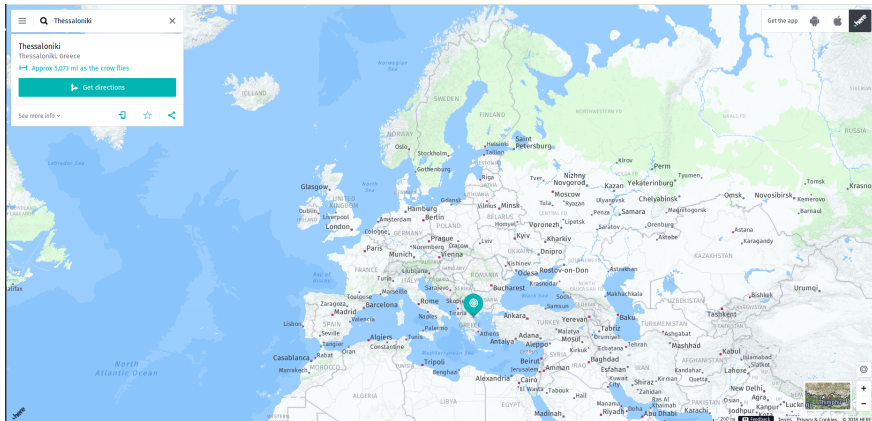
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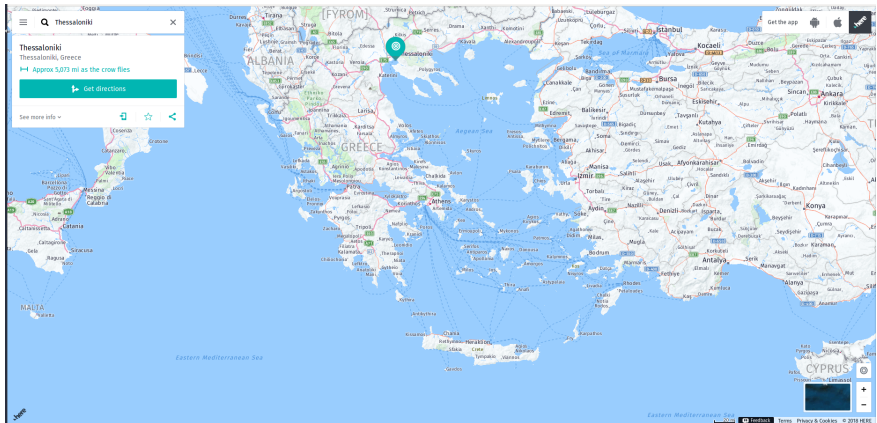
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Sign by the entrance of Aristotle University.



Statue of Aristotle at the Aristotle University



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Project #1

Title	Hanf number for Scott sentences of computable structures
Collaborator(s)	Julia Knight (Notre Dame, IN) Sergey Goncharov (Sobolev Institute, Russia)
Goal	Show that the Hanf number for the Scott sentences of computable structures is $\beth_{\omega_1}^{\aleph_1}$. The same argument proves that $\beth_{\omega_1}^{\aleph_1}$ is the Hanf number for Scott sentences of hyperarithmetical structures.
Result(s)	Goncharov, S.S., Knight, J.F. & Soudatos, I. Arch. Math. Logic (2018) 57: 889. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00153-018-0615-6

Project #2

Title	Non-Absoluteness of Model Existence at \aleph_ω
Collaborator(s)	David Milovich (Texas A&M)
Goal	Prove that for $\mathcal{L}_{\omega_1, \omega}$ -sentences model-existence in \aleph_ω is not absolute for models of ZFC+GCH.
Result(s)	David Milovich, Ioannis Soudatos <i>Fundamenta Mathematicae</i> 243 (2018), 179-193 https://doi.org/10.4064/fm419-12-2017

Project #3

Title	Complete $\mathcal{L}_{\omega_1, \omega}$ -Sentences with Maximal Models in Multiple Cardinalities
Collaborator(s)	John Baldwin (UIC)
Goal	Prove there is a complete $\mathcal{L}_{\omega_1, \omega}$ -sentence with maximal models in more than one cardinality.
Result(s)	Submitted; went back-and-forth with the referee a few times already; waiting for the referee's response. Pre-print: https://arxiv.org/abs/1508.06620

Project #4

Title	Kurepa trees and spectra of $\mathcal{L}_{\omega_1, \omega}$ -sentences
Collaborator(s)	Dima Sinapova (UIC)
Goal	Use Kurepa trees to prove that there is an $\mathcal{L}_{\omega_1, \omega}$ -sentence whose amalgamation spectrum is consistently equal to $[\aleph_1, \aleph_{\omega_1}]$ and consistently equal to $[\aleph_1, 2^{\aleph_1})$, where 2^{\aleph_1} is weakly inaccessible.
Result(s)	Submitted; heard from the referee once; resubmitted and waiting for the referee's response. Pre-print: https://arxiv.org/abs/1705.05821

Project #5

Title	A Lower Bound for the Hanf Number for Joint Embedding
Collaborator(s)	Will Boney (Harvard)
Goal	Prove that the first measurable cardinal is a lower bound for the Hanf number for joint embedding.
Result(s)	Submitted; did not heard from the referee yet Pre-print: https://arxiv.org/abs/1808.03017

Project #6

Title	Implementing WeBWork in Teaching Undergraduate Mathematics Courses (Math Education Research)
Collaborator(s)	Mustafa Demir (Detroit Mercy)
Goal	Examine college students' usage of the web-based homework system WeBWork and the impact of WeBWork on students' course performance.
Result(s)	We are finishing writing up the results; hope to submit within the next month.

Question

I do not understand the results. Can you explain them in a simple way?

Answer: Yes and No. In one sentence, we describe properties of infinite structures using infinity long (Mathematical) sentences. I will need a 50-minute lecture to explain the big picture behind for each one of these results. Some details are even harder to explain because they are very technical.

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Answer: It works like this

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