

For the Price of a Pizza

Do you know what the biggest change in SIAM has been over the past decade? We've established new journals, activity groups, conferences, prizes, . . .

But the biggest story is student members and student chapters. SIAM has quadrupled its activity in this area. It's an amazing transition, and you can see it at any SIAM meeting, where there are many more student attendees and student activities than there used to be. When I say "students," incidentally, I mean mostly graduate students, but quite a few undergraduates are busy with SIAM too.

FROM THE SIAM PRESIDENT

By *Nick Trefethen*

The numbers are remarkable. In the 1990s, we had 1000 or so student members. Then, beginning in 2003, the numbers shot up to 3000, 4000, and now over 5000. What made this happen was the decision to allow many students to become members for free (students at SIAM academic-member institutions, or members of student chapters, or students nominated by SIAM members). Free members don't vote in elections, but they get *SIAM News* and access to *SIAM Review* and, maybe most important, a 30% discount on textbooks. Even paying student members are only charged \$25.

And then there are student chapters. For years there were just a few of them, going back to the first one, founded at Washington University in 1975. But then the idea took off, and now the number is about 90.

When I visit a university, I like to meet the SIAM chapter. Recently it was Arizona, Arizona State, and the University of Michigan, all of which are lively places. What I see in these very enjoyable visits is a kind of catalysis in action. To do applied mathematics, nobody really needs SIAM, but having a student chapter on hand provides a convenient framework and, typically, \$500 or so per year to fund activities. Usually those dollars translate into pizzas at regular chapter meetings organized around a talk or two by a student or a faculty member or a visitor. It's wonderfully fresh and stimulating, and let me tell you, if you are a student reading this, in thirty years you will wish you could bring your colleagues together in a room for the price of a pizza!

Most of the student chapters are still in North America, but there are a dozen or so overseas, including recent new ones at Uppsala in Sweden, KAUST in Saudi Arabia, and Universidad Nacional in Colombia.

I find myself wondering, why has the student side of SIAM grown? Comparing 50 years ago and now, has there been some basic change that led to this? I think a part of the answer must be that people are more connected than they were. When I look back on myself as a student, I see a young man who was smart and serious but nowhere near as plugged-in as students today. So maybe SIAM student activities are just part of the process by which everybody is getting more connected in this wired world.

Speaking of connecting, if you are a student and you have a view about SIAM, please get in touch. When I ask for responses to these columns, most of what comes back is from colleagues of my generation with settled careers. That's fine, but those are people I already know pretty well, and I'd be glad to hear from you too at trefethen@maths.ox.ac.uk. What's good about SIAM? What could be made better?

One thing we think we've made better lately is funding for students to attend SIAM conferences. As you may know, our well-established Student Travel Fund helps students cover the costs of attending annual meetings and other conferences, granting up to \$600 toward travel expenses. The money to support this has come from corporate grants, from NSF, from SIAM's own funds, and from SIAM book authors who have volunteered to give all their royalties to the fund. You can find a list of these generous authors online at SIAM's website.

Recently, the SIAM Board decided to expand the Student Travel Fund. Beginning in 2012, an extra \$100,000 will be allocated each year, and we hope to boost the number of students getting help to attend conferences from about 150 to 300. We can't support everybody, but we can help quite a few, and you will find details at the website. Maybe I'll meet you at a SIAM conference?