

This, then, is our core. We are a grassroots organization of many interwoven communities coming together to share our enthusiasm for mathematics with each other and the rest of the world and to sustain each other as we identify and encourage mathematical talent and prepare the next generations who will use mathematics. Our focus always has been and needs to remain on collegiate-level mathematics, but that focus reaches beyond those who are likely to be future members of our communities. It encompasses the preparation and support of K–12 teachers and the education of all college students.

Three Years of MAA Reviews

Fernando Q. Gouvêa

In January 2006, the MAA unveiled a book review site called *MAA Reviews*. Initially a part of MathDL, it has since been spun off as an independent part of the Association's online presence. As it reaches its third birthday, the site features reviews of more than 2,100 books. It incorporates the MAA's list of books recommended for library acquisition, which today includes some 1,300 titles.

Three factors came together in 2005. I had been running a book review column on MAA Online, and it was popular with visitors to the site. It was time to think about how to expand and enhance that service. The second component was the decision to stop running *Telegraphic Reviews* in the *American Mathematical Monthly*. The old TRs were essentially a database of recent mathematics books, and by moving them online we could cover more books and make the whole thing searchable.

Finally, there was the question of how to update the MAA's list of library recommendations, known to insiders as the "Basic Library List." My Colby colleague Tom Berger was then in charge of this project, and he suggested that the ideal would be to have a large online database of books in which we could simply flag those that we were recommending to libraries.

It is a humbling task to take on the leadership of this sprawling and dynamic organization, but, as I said at the beginning, I am excited about these next two years. There are opportunities to build on our many strengths as we provide services to help our members be the very best mathematicians and educators they can be, even in tough times, and to continue communicating the beauty and importance of mathematics. 🌐

David Bressoud is DeWitt Wallace Professor of Mathematics at Macalester College and President of the MAA. For an interview with David Bressoud see page 6.

On the strength of all that, I proposed to Don Albers, then MAA Director of Publications, that we create what is now *MAA Reviews*. It took some time to develop the software. Meanwhile, I started amassing reviews and data. I was then "the secret master of *MAA Reviews*," because I was editing something that didn't yet exist. We went live three years ago with several hundred reviews, and the site has never stopped growing. I owe a huge debt of thanks to the two groups who made this possible: publishers of

mathematics books and my battalion of reviewers.

Happily, once we had the site going, most publishers of mathematics books were eager to send us stuff. We record all the books we get. Each book has a page with the basic information and an image of its cover;

whenever possible we also post the table of contents. So every book that publishers send to us gets at least a listing. Next comes triage. We would, of course, like to review them all, but that's not really possible. So we designate about half of the books we get as "reviewable." They go to a big table where they sit until someone chooses them.

If the cooperation of publishers is important, the work of our many reviewers is essential: Without it, there just wouldn't be *MAA Reviews*. They're a great crowd of people. Whenever they're ready to do a new review, I send them a list of what's on the "to



review” table, and they choose what they’d like to read. They get a free book, and I almost always get a review.

Reading my reviewers’ work is a pleasure. Some of them are masters of compression, writing a couple of paragraphs that capture what needs to be known about the book. Others write longer reviews that tell us about the mathematics in the book or the quirks of the author. Some write very personal accounts of their interaction with the book; others are cool and objective. Sometimes, they will pan a book that I expected them to like. Other times, they will find virtues in a book I didn’t really think all that much of. It’s a glorious variety of styles, opinions, tastes, and points of view.

I write some reviews myself, of course. There’s a special place on the table for books I want to review myself. That pile tends to get big pretty quickly. Then one day I look at it and realize that it’s time to send some of them off to other homes. Still, over the years I’ve managed to review more than 200 books.

We’ve also run some reviews of “golden oldies.” Sometimes a book is reprinted, but at other times a reviewer just feels that an older book really deserves a review. I’d like to see that happen to all the books in the BLL.

Currently, the full *MAA Reviews* is available only to members or subscribers. On MAA Online (bottom of the home page, in MAA Resources), click on the link for *MAA Reviews*, then click on the “Sign In” link. If you are an MAA member, click the “login here” link. On the new screen, enter your UserName (email address) and Password. For a shortcut, click the “members of the MAA” link on the *MAA Reviews* home page at <http://mathdl.maa.org/mathDL/19/>.

Non-members can also get a taste. Every week, *MAA Reviews* features eight recent reviews on its front page. To see these featured reviews without having to sign in, click on the “*MAA Reviews*” link on the right-hand side of MAA Online’s home page or the “*MAA Reviews* (Free Samples)” link under MAA Resources. However, you must sign in to search or access the full database, see the Basic Library List, and obtain information about books that we have received but haven’t reviewed.

I’ve done many things for the MAA over the last 15 or so years. Without question, running *MAA Reviews* has been the most fun. I just wish more members would come and see what it has to offer. If you do, I think you’ll find that you’ll want to visit us regularly. ☺

In addition to editing MAA FOCUS and MAA Reviews, Fernando Q. Gouvêa is Carter Professor of Mathematics at Colby College. He is sometimes a number theorist, sometimes a historian of mathematics, and sometimes very tired.

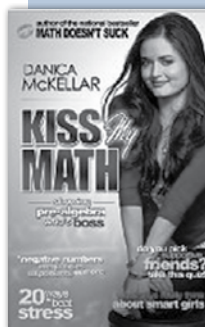


Guesstimation: Solving the World's Problems on the Back of a Cocktail Napkin

Lawrence Weinstein and John A. Adam

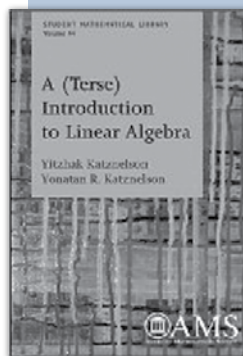
How many tons of batteries would you need to equal the energy contained in one tank of gasoline? How much farmland would be needed to grow enough crops for ethanol to run all the cars in the US? *Guesstimation* teaches you to find approximate answers to these problems, and many others. (Andrew Ross, April 2008)

Teasers



Kiss My Math: Showing Pre-Algebra Who's Boss
Danica McKellar

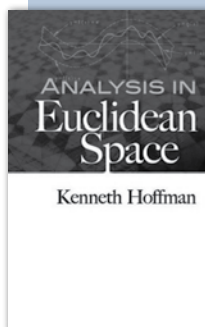
“*Kiss My Math*”? What in the world does that mean? According to author Danica McKellar, it means this: “Um, excuse me, I’m going to do whatever I want with my life, and I’m sure as heck not going to let a little math get in my way.” (Ezra Brown, August 2008)



A (Terse) Introduction to Linear Algebra

Yitzhak Katznelson and
Yonatan R. Katznelson

I believe that this little book could be a perfect guide for that special wunderkind in your vector calculus class, who insists on majoring in engineering but cannot help being interested in mathematics proper. (Gizem Karaali, March 2008)



Analysis in Euclidean Space
Kenneth Hoffman

At times, analysis seems like an arcane, impenetrable bag of magic tricks performed to the initial mystification of the captive audience of students, who are then expected to learn tricks of their own. The familiar and friendly calculation devices from calculus suddenly become trivial by-products of maddeningly abstract, complicated, and alien constructions such as partitions and Cauchy sequences. (Andrew Locascio, January 2008)