

Gowers's Weblog

Mathematics related discussions

Mathematical Research Reports: a “new” mathematics journal is launched

From time to time academic journals undergo an interesting process of fission. Typically as a result of some serious dissatisfaction, the editorial board resigns en masse to set up a new journal, the publishers of the original journal build a new editorial board from scratch, and the result is two journals, one inheriting the editors and collective memory of the original journal, and the other keeping the name and the publisher. Which is the “true” successor? In practice it tends to be the one with the editors, with its sibling surviving as a zombie journal that is the successor in name only. Perhaps there are examples that go the other way, and there may be examples where both journals go on to thrive, but I have not looked closely at the examples I know about.

I’m mentioning this because recently I have been involved in a rather unusual example of this phenomenon. Most cases I know of are the result either of frustration with the practices of the big commercial publishers or of malpractice by an editor-in-chief. But this was an open access journal with no publication charges, and with an extremely efficient and impeccably behaved editor-in-chief. So what was the problem?

The journal started out in 1995 as Electronic Research Announcements of the AMS, or ERA-AMS for short. It was still called that when I first joined the editorial board. Its editor-in-chief was Svetlana Katok, who did a great job, and there was a high-powered editorial board. As its name suggests, it specialized in shortish papers announcing results that would then appear with more details in significantly longer papers, so it was a little like Comptes Rendus in its aim. It would also accept short articles of a more traditional kind.

It never published all that many papers, and in 2007, I think for that reason (but don’t remember for sure), the AMS decided to discontinue it. But Svetlana Katok had put a lot into the journal and managed to find another publisher, the American Institute of Mathematical Sciences, and the editorial board agreed to continue serving. The name of the journal was changed to Electronic Research Announcements in the Mathematical Sciences, and its abbreviation was slightly abbreviated from ERA-AMS to ERA-MS.

In 2016, after 22 years, Svetlana Katok decided to step down, and Boris Hasselblatt took over. It was a good moment to try to revitalize the journal, so measures were taken such as designing a new and better website and making more effort to publicize the journal, in the hope of attracting more submissions (or more precisely, more submissions of a high enough quality that we would want to publish them).

However, despite these measures, the numbers remained fairly low — around ten a year (with quite a bit of variation), and this, indirectly, caused the problem that led to the split. The editors would have liked to see more papers published, but were not worried about it to the point where we would have been prepared to sacrifice quality to achieve it: we were ready to accept that this was, at least for now, a small journal. But AIMS was not so happy. In an effort to remedy (as they saw it) the situation, they appointed a co-editor-in-chief, who in turn appointed a number of new editors, with a more applied focus, with the idea that by broadening the scope of the journal they would increase the number of papers published.

That did not precipitate the resignations, but at that stage most of us did not know that the new editors had been appointed without any consultation even with Boris Hasselblatt. But then AIMS took things a step further. Until that point, the journal had adopted a practice that I strongly approve of, which was for the editor who handled a paper to make a recommendation to the rest of the editorial board, with other editors encouraged to comment on that recommendation. This practice helps to guard against "rogue" editors and against abuse of the system in general. It also helps to maintain consistent standards, and provides a gentle pressure on editors to do their job conscientiously — there's nothing like knowing that you're going to have to justify your decision to a bunch of mathematicians.

But suddenly the publishers told us that this system had to change, and that from now on the editorial board would not have the opportunity to vet papers, and would continue to have no say in new editorial appointments. (Various justifications were given for this, including that it would make it harder to recruit editors if they thought they had to make judgments about papers not in their immediate area.) At that point, it was clear that the soul of the journal was about to be destroyed, so over a few days the entire board (from before the start of the changes) resigned, resolving to start afresh with a new name.

That new name is Mathematical Research Reports (<https://mrr.centre-mersenne.org/>). We will continue to accept reports on longer work, as well as short articles. In addition we welcome short survey articles. We regard it as the continuation in spirit of ERA-MS. Another unusual feature of this particular split is that the other half, still published by AIMS, has also changed its name and is now called Electronic Research Archive (<https://www.aims sciences.org/journal/A0000-0004>).

If, like me, you are always on the lookout for high-quality "ethical" journals (which I loosely define as free to read, free to publish in, and adopting high standards of editorial practice), then please add Mathematical Research Reports to your list. Have a look at the back catalogue of ERA-MS and ERA-AMS and you will get an idea of our standards. It would be wonderful if the unfortunate events of the last year or so were to be the catalyst that led to the journal finally becoming established in the way that it has deserved to be for a long time.

This entry was posted on May 20, 2020 at 2:50 pm and is filed under [News](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can [leave a response](#), or [trackback](#) from your own site.

9 Responses to “Mathematical Research Reports: a “new” mathematics journal is launched”

Jon1 Says:

[May 20, 2020 at 5:12 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

This looks like a fine “new” journal, and Centre Mersenne is a great platform indeed!

May I ask: what is usually the process to produce an announcement (the point being that it is published rapidly) ? Do authors downsize a fully written longer paper (i.e. do they have the reassurance the editors that it has been done), or can they submit sketches they feel certain will not contain major loopholes? And are you planning to include links to the longer papers in other journals when they appear?

gowers Says:

[May 20, 2020 at 8:47 pm](#)

I think it could vary from case to case, but one situation might be the following. You’ve proved a result that has a long and complicated proof that few people are likely to read in detail, but the main ideas of the proof can be explained in ten to fifteen pages. So you write a full paper, which will probably take a long time to appear, and a shorter more friendly “announcement” that appears in MRR.

An example of an announcement that served this purpose is the following paper of Green and Tao:

<https://www.aimsciences.org/article/doi/10.3934/era.2011.18.69>

porton Says:

[May 22, 2020 at 8:53 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

“research announcements of significant advances in all branches of mathematics, short complete papers of original research (up to about 15 journal pages), and review articles (up to about 30 journal pages).” It is forgotten to say what should be the number of pages of research announcements.

It is complicated further by the fact that I am reviewing my own research published as a monograph (not as articles). Is it a research announcement or review article?

So, how many pages my description of my research may contain?

porton Says:

[May 22, 2020 at 8:55 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

Reblogged this on [Victor Porton's Math Blog](#).

porton Says:

[May 24, 2020 at 6:44 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

I've submitted to the journal a survey of my "algebraic general topology" (<https://mathematics21.org/algebraic-general-topology-and-math-synthesis/>) research.

Yiftach Says:

[May 25, 2020 at 6:05 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

Hi, with the existence of the Arxiv what is the point of an announcement in a journal? Clearly, the journal and the referees cannot validate the proof. So you can just post the announcement on the Arxiv.

gowers Says:

[May 31, 2020 at 8:45 am](#)

What's the point of journals at all? Validation is part of it, but realistically if a long technical paper is published, that is not a guarantee that it is correct. The main other point is to give a paper a "stamp of quality". One can argue (and I have argued) that there ought to be better ways of doing this, but that's the system we have at the moment.

Maybe a slightly better answer is that if you don't have a journal for announcements, people won't bother to write them, which is a pity as having shorter digests of long complicated arguments can be useful.

Yiftach Says:

[May 31, 2020 at 11:15 am](#)

Well, firstly with a long technical paper anyone who would like to verify it can. Secondly, the referee is supposed to try to verify it. More practically, someone applies to a job and one of their papers is an announcement, how am I supposed to treat such a paper? Is it fair to treat it as a paper?

anonymous Says:

[September 14, 2020 at 8:29 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

The majority of the JCT A editorial boards have recently notified Elsevier that they will not be renewing their contracts, and will resign after December 2020. New journal here: <http://math.sfsu.edu/beck/ct/>

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