

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY'S MATHEMATICS DEPARTMENT: 2020-2021 NEWSLETTER



LETTER FROM THE CHAIR Prof. Eric Zaslow

Northwestern University
Mathematics Department



A light at the end of this dark tunnel brings hope for a grand reopening. Without a doubt, our community has persevered impressively through these difficult times, and these paragraphs will detail how. But we all need more joy in our work: the joy of chatting in the department office; of bantering about recipes and etymologies at lunch; of tea and cookies; of listening to our colleagues ask probing questions in their tell-tale way at seminars; the joy of the classroom dynamic; of the Socratic exchange of ideas in our offices; of riding the bus or train with our mates; the joy of doing mathematics at Lunt and Locy alongside others who are as dedicated as we are. It is my most sincere wish that circumstances allow us to reclaim that sense of joy for ourselves and each other.

So as we look toward a more promising future, let us not deny ourselves the pleasure of celebrating some of our major achievements of the past year.

We had **two** Sloan Fellowship winners this year, **Xiumin Du** and **Ilya Khayutin**! (There was some internal discussion about whether such a feat was even possible; the outcome is no doubt a testament to the research strength of these colleagues.) We also had ***two*** Simons Fellowship winners: **Jared Wunsch** and **Bryna Kra**. **Kitty Yang**, now a postdoc at The University of Memphis but a recent graduate student, won the Weinberg Outstanding Graduate Student Teaching Award for 2019-20 — the ceremony was delayed until this year. Two of our faculty members were promoted to the highest rank in their tracks. **Ursula Porod** was promoted to Professor of Instruction and **Antonio Auffinger** was promoted to Professor of Mathematics. Congratulations to Profs. Porod and Auffinger!

In writing the above, I am omitting all the publications of our faculty in top journals. In fact, one bright spot from the past year was Prof. **Antonio Auffinger's** faculty seminar. While created to introduce the research of faculty to the graduate students, fellow faculty members have become quite enthralled with it! It has also been an essential way for department members to have valuable (non-committee) facetime with one another. Thank you, Tuca! Speaking of grads, a hearty congratulations to this year's new PhDs: **Yajit Jain**, **Perry Kleinhenz**, **Xi (Sisi) Shen**, **Pyongwon Suh**, **Yu (Sid) Wang**, **Yuxiang Wang** and **Mingyi Zhang**. More are expected to graduate this summer. You can read more about the graduate and undergraduate programs in these pages, in the messages from respective Directors Auffinger and Cañez.

We are delighted to have two new faculty members arriving on campus in Fall 2021. **Yuchen Liu**, an algebraic geometer whom we hired last year, will begin his appointment as Assistant Professor, and will be joined by Assistant Professor **Gus Schrader**, our hire from this year. Prof. Schrader works in representation theory and mathematical physics.

This marks my last message as chair. It has been a privilege to be selected for this role. In trying to serve in this capacity, I have benefited greatly from the generous help of **Deavon Mitchell**, **Janima Lyon**, **John Mocek**, **Liz Gabel** and **Miguel Lerma**, as well as the many faculty and students who have served on committees, offered advice, and generally invested themselves into the lifeblood of this department. I am sincerely grateful to you.

Finally, let me add that my feeling of hopefulness about our future together is only strengthened by the knowledge that our department will be led by incoming chair **Ben Weinkove**. His energy, wisdom and care will help us shine as an institution and as a community.



"There is every reason to be hopeful about the future, as the department has repeatedly shown its resilience and strength—in teaching, administration, research, and as a community"

- NU Math Dept Chair, Prof. Eric Zaslow



GROW Conference 2016, Hosted By NU Mathematics Department

NUAWM (NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY FOR WOMEN IN MATHEMATICS) LAUNCHES MENTORING NETWORK

The Northwestern University Association for Women in Mathematics chapter (NUAWM) is excited to announce a new Mentoring Network program. The program connects undergraduates with either graduate student or senior undergraduate mentors to help navigate the process of obtaining a mathematics degree at NU.

The inaugural run in the Spring of 2021 included 15 undergraduate mentees and 12 mentors who were a mix of undergraduate and graduate students. Students had a chance to meet their potential mentors at a Speed Mentoring event held at the beginning of the quarter. The program was organized by postdocs Katrina Morgan and Eva Belmont with the help of undergraduate members of NUAWM.

The goal of the network is to increase retention in the math major of students from underrepresented groups by building connections within the mathematics department and creating a forum in which students are comfortable asking questions. NUAWM plans to continue the program, providing an opportunity for new students to be paired with a mentor.

Northwestern's Association for Women in Mathematics chapter (NUAWM) is a group of students who, regardless of gender-identity or major, are interested in fostering gender diversity in mathematics. NUAWM hosts a variety of events such as dinners with faculty members, informal lunches, and talks by faculty, grad students, and undergraduates about research or diversity in mathematics.

Information on NUAWM events is distributed through its listserv. NU students can subscribe at <https://listserv.it.northwestern.edu/scripts/wa.exe?HOME> by searching NUAWM and logging in or you can email Miranda Brodsky (MirandaBrodsky2022@u.northwestern.edu) with a request to subscribe or any questions regarding NUAWM.

NU MATH PROFESSORS DU AND KHAYUTIN AWARDED 2021 SLOAN RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP

Northwestern University Mathematics faculty members, Prof. **Xiumin Du** and Prof. **Ilya Khayutin**, have been awarded 2021 Sloan Research Fellowships.

Open to scholars in eight scientific and technical fields—chemistry, computational and evolutionary molecular biology, computer science, Earth system science, economics, mathematics, neuroscience, and physics—the Sloan Research Fellowships are awarded in close coordination with the scientific community. Candidates must be nominated by their fellow scientists and winners are selected by independent panels of senior scholars on the basis of a candidate's research accomplishments, creativity, and potential to become a leader in his or her field. More than 1000 researchers are nominated each year for 128 fellowship slots. Winners receive a two-year, \$75,000 fellowship which can be spent to advance the fellow's research.



Ilya Khayutin



Xiumin Du

NU MATH GRADUATE STUDENT, YAJIT JAIN, AWARDED NSF POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP



Yajit Jain

Yajit Jain, a mathematics graduate student at Northwestern University, has been awarded a 2021 NSF Postdoctoral Research Fellowship.

The Mathematical Sciences Postdoctoral Research Fellowships (MSPRF) supports future leaders in mathematics and statistics by facilitating their participation in postdoctoral research environments that will have maximal impact on their future scientific development. There are two options for awardees: Research Fellowship and Research Instructorship. Awards will support research in areas of mathematics and statistics, including applications to other disciplines.



SNAP Conference 2019, Hosted By NU Mathematics Department

NU MATH PROFESSORS KRA AND WUNSCH NAMED 2021 SIMONS FELLOWS



From Top to Bottom: Bryna Kra, Jared Wunsch

Northwestern University and the Simons Foundation congratulates the outstanding mathematicians and theoretical physicists who have been awarded Simons Fellowships in 2021.

Two of Northwestern University Mathematics faculty, Prof. **Bryna Kra** and Prof. **Jared Wunsch**, are among the 2021 Simons Award recipients. Prof. Kra's project is "Topological and Ergodic Properties of Symbolic Systems." Prof. Wunsch's project is "Propagation of Singularities, Diffraction, and Decay of Waves."

The Simons Fellows Program extends academic leaves from one term to a full year, enabling recipients to focus solely on research for the long periods often necessary for significant advances. The Simons Foundation Mathematics and Physical Sciences (MPS) division supports research in mathematics, theoretical physics and theoretical computer science by providing funding for individuals, institutions and science infrastructure.

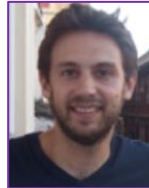
2021 UIC COMPLEX GEOMETRY SEMINAR

The UIC Complex Geometry Seminar was held remotely via two talks—on April 13th and April 20th, in partnership with Northwestern University and Notre-Dame. It was organized by **Julius Ross** (UIC), **Gábor Székelyhidi** (Notre Dame), and **Ben Weinkove** (Northwestern University) and was supported in part by a National Science Foundation RTG grant, National Science Foundation CAREER grant, and A National Science Foundation grant.

Eleonora Di Nezza (École Polytechnique) presented the first talk on April 13, "Families of Kähler-Einstein metrics". **Duong H. Phong** (Columbia) presented the 2nd talk on April 20th, "Geometric Partial Differential Equations from Unified String Theories".



Julius Ross, Gábor Székelyhidi



Ben Weinkove

SPRING 2021 FACULTY TALKS LAUNCHED



Antonio Auffinger

Organized by Director of Graduate Studies, Prof. **Antonio Auffinger**, Northwestern University Mathematics Department introduced biweekly faculty talks, which began April 9.

The Faculty Talks, held on every other Friday, are a 15 min wide audience talk given by one of our NU Mathematics Faculty. The main goal of this series is to showcase a few of the research topics of our department to first and second year graduate students. Every talk is followed by questions and a happy hour with the speaker.

NU MATH FACULTY AWARDED OER FACULTY GRANT

Northwestern Faculty Members, **Aaron Greicius** and **Sean McAfee**, have been awarded a \$10,000 Open Educational Resources (OER) Faculty Grant for their proposal to develop open-source resources for the Math 220 sequence. The aim of the project is to develop an extensive



Aaron Greicius, Sean McAfee

open-source learning resource for calculus courses in the Mathematics Department, effectively free of cost to students. This single resource would include a large variety of components-- including a complete textbook with embedded videos from an in-house video library, embedded computational cells, a large bank of exercises for written homework, and integration of an open-source online homework system.

This is an ambitious project that will take several years to complete. By the end of the first year, Greicius and McAfee hope to produce skeletal versions of the text corresponding to topics covered in Math 220-1 and Math 220-2. Additionally they plan on working with other faculty to reach consensus on choices of definitions and statements of theory, as well as to recruit future collaborators.

NU MATH DEPT ALUMNI, KITTY YANG, RECEIVED 2020 WCAS OUTSTANDING GRADUATE STUDENT TEACHING AWARD



Kitty Yang

Szu Ting (Kitty) Yang received the Outstanding Graduate Student Teaching Award by Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences for the academic year 2019-2020. The award deliberations were delayed due to the pandemic. Kitty Yang graduated from Northwestern University in 2020 and is now a postdoc at the University of Memphis.

Each year Weinberg College selects three teaching assistants to receive Weinberg College Outstanding Graduate Student Teaching Awards, one per division. The award carries a cash stipend of \$1,000.



Kitty Yang and Paul Goerss at 2018 NU Math Graduate and Teaching Awards

LETTER FROM DIRECTOR OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES, Prof. Santiago Cañez



This was a unique and challenging year, but I am happy to report that our undergraduate students and teaching faculty helped make this a very successful year nonetheless. This year's graduating class is expected to include 46 majors and 6 minors, a few of which warrant special mention.

Two of our students wrote senior theses this year. **Nicholas Karris**, this year's winner of the Robert R. Welland Prize for Outstanding Achievement in Mathematics by a Graduating Senior, wrote an excellent thesis on the topic of *Poisson-Lie groups*, and will begin the PhD program in mathematics at UC San Diego this fall. **Charlie Dziedzic** wrote an excellent thesis on *Poincare Duality*, and, along with Nick and many others, helped contribute to the success of our calculus courses through his service as an undergraduate teaching assistant.

Despite the challenges of remote learning and teaching via Zoom, the Northwestern Emerging Scholars Program had another successful year, due in large part to the work of **Nick Karris**, **Emma Eder**, **Lauren Chandler-Holtz**, and **Gabriel Petersen** as student mentors. Special thanks also to faculty mentors **Eric Chang** and **Christian Geske**, and graduate student **Anthony McCormick** for helping to make this program run smoothly. The Northwestern Undergraduate Math Society was also able to put on many great events throughout the year. Thanks to co-presidents **Yintian Zhan** and **Zihan Wu** for their years of service.

On the faculty side, **Aaron Greicius** and **Sean McAfee** were awarded a grant by the Northwestern Affordable Instructional Resources Initiative for a project aimed at creating a set of open-source resources for our single-variable calculus courses. This is a great undertaking, and we look forward to seeing what they produce! It should be noted that this is the second such project Aaron is involved with, after having won a grant last year for work on open-source linear algebra resources.

The ongoing pandemic brought challenges but opportunities as well. Faculty thought carefully about how to best make use of the virtual setting, and I believe some best practices that were developed will carry on. Preparation for remote teaching this past fall actually began last summer, with multiple faculty members going above-and-beyond with their time to think about how to best structure our calculus courses. **Aaron Peterson**, **Aaron Greicius**, and **Maria Nastasescu** deserve special recognition for their efforts. The undergraduate committee was able to continue the work of developing learning objectives for our undergraduate program, and next year will begin the task of evaluating our current major and minor requirements in light of these objectives.

My first year as Director of Undergraduate Studies was unlike any I would have expected. Despite the uncertainty and restrictions in place, the work done by our faculty and students was truly exceptional. Thanks to all who helped make this year a success, including the donors who make many of our events possible.

To Direct a Gift to the NU Department of Mathematics, Visit:
www.northwestern.edu/giving/index.html
 Earmark your gift for "Department of Mathematics" in the Gift Designation "Other" Box

REMOTE TEACHING FACULTY PANEL DISCUSSION HELD APRIL 8TH

In Spring 2021 the Math Department faculty leadership chose to analyze and reflect on how we can improve remote teaching methods. Prof. **Yotam Hendel** and Prof. **John Alongi** organized the Remote Teaching Panel Discussion, held on Thursday, April 8th.

The Director of Undergraduate Studies (Prof. **Santiago Cañez**), Director of Calculus (Prof. **Aaron Greicius**), and Director of MENU (Prof. **Aaron Peterson**) led the discussion and answered questions about effective remote mathematics instruction.

Some of the topics discussed included how to increase student participation in the remote setting, what are the advantages of the remote environment that can be expanded upon, how remote examinations can be improved, what are effective strategies for proctoring remote examinations, which modes of in-class content delivery should be considered, and what are the advantages and disadvantages of each. All faculty and graduate students were invited to attend.



From Top to Bottom: Yotam Hendel, John Alongi, Santiago Cañez, Aaron Greicius, Aaron Peterson

LETTER FROM DIRECTOR OF GRADUATE STUDIES,
Prof. Antonio Auffinger



As a unique academic year ends, our graduate program is proud to celebrate our students resilience and accomplishments. Ten of our graduate students will earn their PhDs in 2021: **Yajit Jain, Signe Jensen, Nilay Kumar, Rachel McEnroe, Grigory Papayanov, Xi Sisi Shen, Pyongwon Suh, Junxiao Wang, Aydin Yousefzadehfard, and Mingyi Zhang.**

Kumar, Rachel McEnroe, Grigory Papayanov, Xi Sisi Shen, Pyongwon Suh, Junxiao Wang, Aydin Yousefzadehfard, and Mingyi Zhang.

Yajit Jain and **Xi Sisi Shen** shared the annual Best Thesis Award. Yajit worked under the guidance of Prof. **John Francis**. In his thesis he proves a conjecture of Goette-Igusa, from 2010, on the vanishing of the higher smooth structure class and the rational vanishing of groups of stabilized exotic smoothings for bundles with even-dimensional fibers. Sisi was supervised by Prof. **Ben Weinkove**. In her thesis, Sisi develops estimates for constant scalar curvature metrics in the setting of non-Kähler manifolds. This extends an important theorem of Chen-Cheng (2018) on constant scalar curvature Kähler metrics. Yajit will move to Brown University as NSF postdoctoral fellow while Sisi will join the faculty at Columbia as a Joseph F. Ritt Assistant Professor.

The Gelfand Award, which recognizes a graduate student who has achieved outstanding progress in their own research or made extraordinary contributions to the research goals of the department's graduate community, went to **Mengxuan Yang**. Mengxuan is a major contributor to graduate and undergraduate student life and learning at NU. Mengxuan is ubiquitous at departmental events, panel discussions, and talks. He's a key member of the student community and a credit to our grad program. He is seen by his peers as "ambitious", "super friendly" and "energetic". His research progress is also going at full speed. With three completed projects, he has a booming research career in analysis of diffractive wave propagation under the guidance of Prof. **Jared Wunsch**. Congrats, Mengxuan!

Congratulations also to **Katy Loyd** who won the Department Teaching Assistant award. She is becoming a legend, as there is a myth that she holds a perfect record of zero regrade requests. Her office hours and TA sessions are so packed and popular that it crashed Zoom once. Well done, Katy!

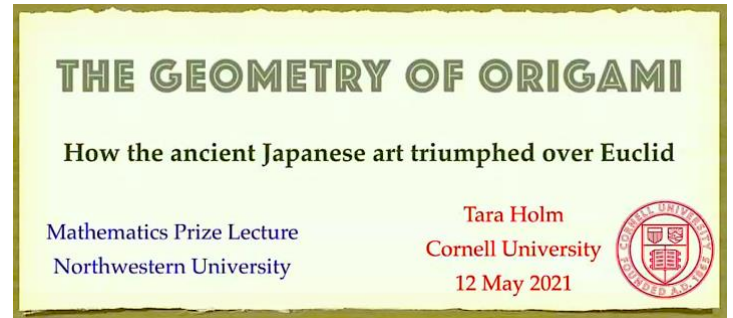
Last but not least, a rare feat that doesn't happen every year: special kudos to **Greg Bixler** who won the best prelim award for scoring almost perfect scores in all three preliminary exams! Woo-hoo!

After a fantastic incoming class of graduate students in 2020, our incoming class in 2021 has 10 new students. Joining our family next year are: **Seljon Akhmedli** (North Dakota State University), **Noah Ankney** (Michigan State University), **Maria Berishaj** (Wayne State University), **Benjamin Ellis-Bloor** (Australian National University), **Curtis Grant** (University of Toronto), **Matthew Lipman** (Harvard University), **Bekham Myers** (Harvard University), **Juan Diego Rojas Correa** (Universidad de los Andes), **Luke Trujillo** (Harvey Mudd College), **Yuanning (Andy) Zhang** (University of California, Berkeley). We can't wait to meet you all!

I wanted to end this short letter by thanking the efforts of our graduate students, staff, and faculty, that helped our graduate community remain connected as ever. You all came up with nice ideas in the past year (I even learned how to play Among Us) and I truly appreciate it! This is also my last letter as DGS as Prof. **Elton Hsu** gladly accepted to take on this duty next year. Thanks, Elton! I wish you the best in this beautiful and important role.

2021 NU MATH UNDERGRADUATE AWARDS

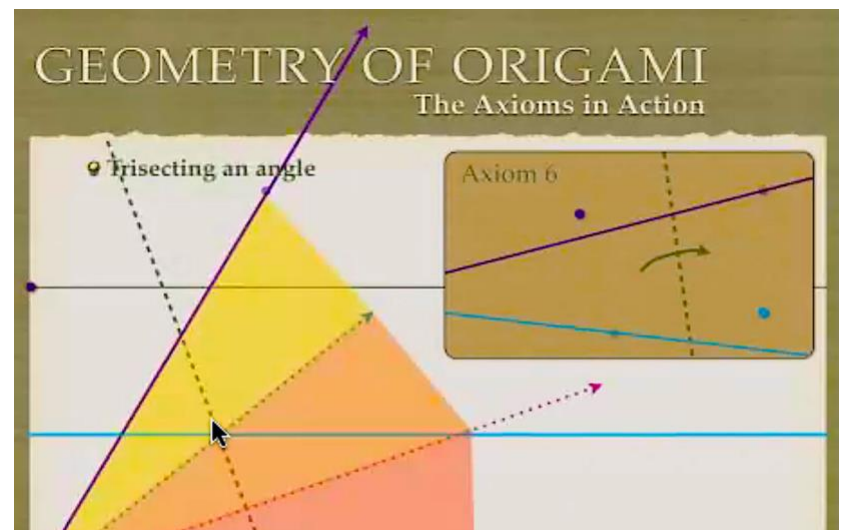
The 2021 Undergraduate Awards and Lecture were held via zoom on Wednesday, May 12th. Over 50 NU Math faculty, graduate students, award winners, Math office staff, and guests were in attendance. The featured speaker was Prof. **Tara Holm** of Cornell University, whose talk was titled, "The Geometry of Origami: How the Ancient Japanese Art Triumphed Over Euclid".



The abstract of her talk is listed below:

"In ancient Greece, Euclid described a system of geometry in The Elements. There are deep connections between this geometry and questions in algebra, as explained by the 19th century French mathematician and political activist Evariste Galois. These

will allow us to settle the classical questions of Euclidean geometry. Next, we will explore the ancient Japanese art of origami, and discover how paper folding can be turned into a framework for studying geometry. This paper-folding alternative can do everything Euclid could do, and more! Indeed, this seemingly abstract mathematical theory can have surprising and useful applications."



Presentation slide by Prof. Tara Holm, 2021 UG Awards



Some of the NU Math faculty, students, staff, and guests attending the remote 2021 NU Mathematics Undergraduate Awards

2021 NU MATHEMATICS UNDERGRADUATE AWARD WINNERS

Robert R. Welland Prize for Outstanding Achievement in Mathematics: Nicholas Karris

Senior Career Award in Mathematics: Zihan Wu, Yintian Zhan

Junior Career Award in Mathematics: Benjamin Major, Yunru (Rose) Zheng

Award for Outstanding Contributions to Undergraduate Mathematical Life: Nicholas Karris

Award for High Achievement on the William Lowell Putnam Examination: Akhil Kalghatgi

Award for Excellence as an Undergraduate Teaching Assistant: Benjamin Major

Undergraduate Teaching Assistant Service Award: Nicholas Karris, Neil Vakharia

Award for Excellence in Mathematics by a First-Year Student:

Varun Banati, Nick Dorai, Rob Dubinski, Emily Ershstein, Samuel Fiete, Levi Hoogendoorn, Yuhan (Alex) Jin, Varsha Krishna, Kierthan Lathrop, Eric Ma, Jacob Platnick, Valeriia Rohoza, Austin Segal, Fiona Wang, Yao Xiao, Bobby Yalam, Ada Zhong

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 Mr. James Andrew Ahrens
 Ms. Cara Maureen Angelmar
 Mr. Hugo Angelmar
 Mrs. Martha Aronson
 Lisa Bailey, MD
 Mr. Thomas Joseph Bart
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 Ms. Naomi Jiwon Chun
 Ms. Judith A. Clark
 Mr. Jeffrey Joseph Conroy
 Ms. Christina Marie Copre
 Eric Rubiel Dolores Cuenca, PhD
 Mrs. Deborah Rachel Deck
 Mr. Jason William Deck
 Ms. Susan DiCaprio
 Erik Doeff, PhD
 Ms. Gail Rosenbaum Doeff
 Dr. Dong Dong
 Prof. Xiumin Du
 Ms. Kathleen E. Eaton
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