

# The (Not So) Distressing Math Collective

Seppo Niemi-Colvin '16

For the past four years I have participated in a Bryn Mawr club known as the Distressing Math Collective (DMC), and for the past three years I have helped to coordinate it. DMC has been a highlight of my experience in the Bryn Mawr Math Department, and has provided me with me an informal place to learn math and to bond with other mathematicians outside the classroom.

Club meetings start at 7 PM on Thursdays in the Math Seminar Room, or whenever we decide to begin, which is typically between 7:10 and 7:15 PM. At that point the speaker presents an interesting math topic, whether it be a result from their own research, or something they are learning about in class. The audience is encouraged to ask questions and to make comments on points ranging from the math involved in the presentation to the shape suggested by a particular knot diagram (for example, a bunny, a cat, a tuxedo, a Crystal Gem... the possibilities are endless). Talks do not have to be polished, and in fact, it is assumed that the speaker has not had much time to prepare.

DMC has three rules: (1) If it is a presenter's first time speaking, then the audience should keep the interruptions and snark to a minimum. (2) If somebody comes in late, then the presenter has to give a quick recap. (3) No throwing things. After the speaker finishes, a card game commences. The traditional choice of DMC is Fish, which is like Go Fish, but is more complicated and more fun. We even have special DMC cards with owls on the back, and a cloth card holder with a Fish-related diagram on the inner flap. Because Fish requires exactly six people to play, we sometimes break out a second deck for additional people to engage in a second game, or we switch to a game for five people known as Dahimi. In any case, DMC is a relaxing way to spend a Thursday evening, and it provides participants with something to look forward to during the week.

I attended DMC throughout my freshman year before I was invited to help coordinate the club. During my sophomore year I simply asked each speaker for both a serious and a funny title for their talk, and then emailed the titles to the math department and anyone else interested in the club. During my junior and senior years, I also took up the job of tracking down speakers for upcoming weeks. Given that talks are done on a volunteer basis, and students at Bryn Mawr and Haverford are not known for their copious free time, this was not always an easy task, but it certainly was not impossible. Students have given talks on summer research, articles read for senior conference, papers written for classes, thesis work, and

results pulled off of the Internet.

I am far from the only person involved in DMC. Professor Helen Grundman has provided guidance and advice to the club since its inception. She appreciates the fact that the club provides a space for students interested in mathematics to meet each other. She also enjoys the casual environment in which students can practice public speaking skills.



Seppo Niemi-Colvin with AB/MA Thesis Advisors <sup>10</sup>

Last year Prof. Grundman was on medical leave, so other faculty pitched in to keep the club running. In the fall of 2014, Professor Paul Melvin filled Helen's role as faculty supervisor. He had not participated in DMC before agreeing to cover for her, but he quickly found the talks interesting and fun. He also became fond of the card games. Unfortunately, in the spring semester, another commitment required his attention, so Professor Isabel Averill took his place. Isabel not only delights in listening to the talks, but also in finding interesting snacks, including teas and a different type of Oreo cookie almost every week. Meanwhile, Rose Kaplan-Kelley '17 rose to the occasion as a fellow student coordinator, occasionally sending out emails and helping recruit speakers. She says DMC was a deciding factor in choosing to come to Bryn Mawr College because it showed how Bryn Mawr supports its students in mathematics outside of the classroom. Her interest in mathematics initially inspired her attendance, and being able to learn new topics and meet new people has kept her coming. She enjoys the close community and relaxed atmosphere that make the club unique.

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<sup>10</sup>Image: Lisa Traynor