

Program Inspires Houston Students to Explore Mathematics

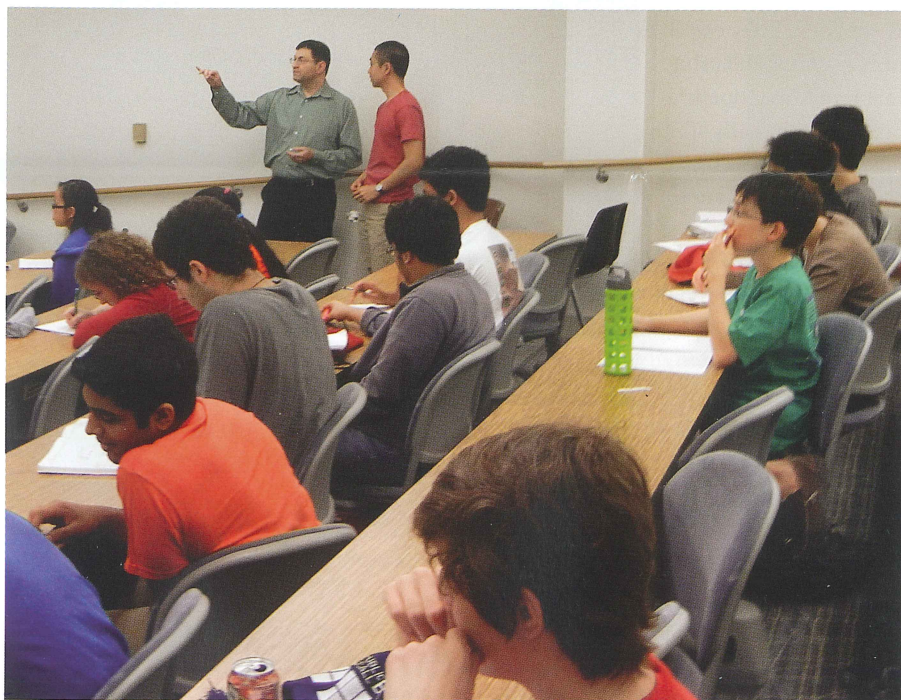
The first meeting of Rice's Math Circle brought together about 70 precollege Houston students who explored and solved challenging problems in number theory, inequalities, geometry, polynomials and mathematical induction.

This group joins a national network of Math Circles, organizations that unite mathematicians and precollege students who are interested in mathematics. Math Circles create opportunities for stimulating mathematics enrichment, while providing faculty members with opportunities to provide university outreach.

Students meet with mathematicians in informal settings to work on challenging problems or explore topics in mathematics that receive little or no attention in precollege classes.

The goal is to inspire these students to explore math and encourage a passion for the subject. Math Circles are an ideal way for gifted students to interact with mathematicians and university students who love mathematics.

The Math Circle was launched in September



PROBLEMATIC FUN: Precollege students meet with mathematicians for a stimulating day of solving challenging problems.

from past Mathematical Olympiads and American Regions Mathematics League. Students meet in September on selected Sundays on the Rice campus.

Franco led the presentations and was helped by Rice mathematics faculty and graduate students and by Isil Nal, mathematics teacher and assistant principal at the Harmony School of Excellence in Houston. Franco is a former Math Olympiad coach who envisioned the Rice Math Circle as a way to attract and support the development of students gifted in mathematics.

"The Rice mathematics department is pleased to host some of the brightest and most creative students from across Houston," said Hassett. "We are delighted to see them doing math because they love it and gratified that teachers and other members of the community are devoting their time to mentoring them. We are especially appreciative to

Zachary Franco for his leadership in starting this program."

► For those interested in learning more about Rice's Math Circle, please visit <http://math.rice.edu/MathCircle/index.html>. Problems, solutions and readings from prior meetings may be found on the site as well as dates for future meetings. Rice's Math Circle offers a tremendous opportunity for students who are bored with the lack of challenging problems presented in their schools.

by Zachary Franco, a fellow at Baylor College of Medicine; Anne Papakonstantinou, director of the Rice University School Mathematics Project; and Brendan Hassett, professor and chair of Rice's Department of Mathematics.

"I am pleased there is interest in this program both from Rice and the Houston community. Houston has a large number of math whizzes," said Franco. "While Internet resources exist for these students, learning math as part of a citywide group like this is more fun."

The Rice Math Circle is designed for Houston-area students in grades 7–12 who have a basic knowledge of geometry, have mastered algebra and want to solve world-class math problems, such as those

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