

Committee to Select the Gibbs Lecturer

General Description

- Committee is standing
- Number of members is three
- Term is two years

One committee recommends lecturers for an odd numbered year followed by an even numbered year. Then committee is replaced.

Principal Activities

To select a candidate to present the Gibbs Lecture in each of two successive years. The lectures are by invitation, and are explicitly designated as public lectures. Publicity for the lectures is directed to the local community, including local high schools and universities, and to scientific organization such as AAAS and Sigma Xi. The publicly stated description of the lecture is as follows:

To commemorate the name of Professor Gibbs, the American Mathematical Society established an honorary lectureship in 1923 to be known as the Josiah Willard Gibbs Lectureship. The lectures are of popular nature, directed at those who are not professional mathematicians, and are given by invitation. They are usually devoted to mathematics or to some aspect of its general applications. The goal of these lectures is to enable the public and the academic community to become more aware of the beauty and power of mathematics and to gain a clearer understanding of the contribution that mathematics is making to present-day thinking and to modern civilization.

Programs of lectures listing past speakers with subjects and places of publication are available.

The lectures tend to alternate between mathematicians with knowledge of applications and nonmathematicians with a good knowledge of mathematics. In that sense, the odd year is assigned to a mathematician and the even year to a nonmathematician.

There is a problem with getting lectures that are at the proper level, on the one hand precise and informative and on the other hand accessible to a diversity of persons with a good general mathematical background. This is a situation that must be conveyed to the speaker by the Secretary when the selection is completed and the invitation is issued.

Although final selection of the speakers is left to the Committee, the Executive Committee wishes to have the opportunity to comment on the short list from which the choice is made. The Executive Committee has been insistent on seeing information about each proposed speaker. A vita is a good beginning but the EC wishes more than that in support of a recommendation, such information as a paragraph about the speaker's field of interest and merit as a lecturer. See the attached report from a subcommittee of the Executive Committee.

The Committee is asked not to communicate with candidates. The EC wishes not to be put in the position of being unable to reject a suggestion.

Inasmuch as it is possible that an invitation will be declined, the Committee may wish to have more than one candidate in mind. The Committee is asked to pass its pool of acceptable names to the Secretary who will in turn deliver them to the next Committee as an aid to its deliberations.

As a matter of information to the Committee, it should be stated that the Society pays an honorarium of \$1000 together with full travel expenses within the United States. The Lecturer has the right, without obligation, to publish a version of his lecture in the *Bulletin*.

Other Activities

Miscellaneous Information

The business of this committee can be done by mail, electronic mail, or telephone, expenses which may be reimbursed by the Society.

On 18 May 1984 (as reported in the November 1984 ECBT Minutes), the Executive Committee approved the following report of a subcommittee (P.R. Halmos and M. Hochster) of the EC.

COLLOQUIUM LECTURERS, GIBBS LECTURERS, PRIZE WINNERS

A report of a subcommittee of the EC

Certain of the Council's decisions (the selection of the Colloquium and Gibbs lectures and the selection of the recipients of the Society's prizes) have traditionally been delegated to special committees and then routinely approved by the EC. The procedure has not been totally satisfactory. (In most cases the EC gave rubber stamp approval, sometimes recommending committee didn't even produce its nominee's CV.)

As a compromise between, in effect, doing the work of the special committees (undesirable interference) and merely being informed of their decisions (insufficient supervision), the subcommittee recommends that the EC in the future use a system of combined input and pre-approval, as follows:

The special committees should submit to the EC their semifinal short list of choices (ordinarily two or three names for each slot), together with a one-page summary of the documentation justifying each name on the list, and to do so before receiving preliminary acceptance from the suggested nominees. The system should not be inflexible: if, for instance, the special committee feels strongly that there is a single obvious choice, it will suffice that that fact be communicated to the EC. For the Gibbs Lecturers, it would be desirable for the selection committee to provide some insight into the mathematical component of the proposed lecturers' work, not merely his credentials within his own area.

The EC may comment on each name ("acceptable", "unacceptable", "excellent"), and possibly even suggest another name or two for the special committee's consideration. The final choice is to be left to the special committee. The EC is to be informed of it, but need no longer approve it.

Note to the Chair

Committee chairs should be informed, at the beginning of each fiscal period, of the budget of their committees and cautioned to remain within the budget. Such items as travel reimbursement, accommodations, and meals for guests of any kind fall within these budgets.

Work done by committees on recurring problems may have value as precedent or work done may have historical interest. Because of this, the Council has requested that a central file system be maintained for the Society by the Secretary. Committees are reminded that a copy of every sheet of paper should be deposited (say once a year) in this central file. Confidential material should be noted, so that it can be handled in a confidential manner.

Authorization

updated 11/93; 12/94; 5/95; 3/99; 1/01; 8/09; 1/14 Note, Misc Info, members, lecturers

Past Members

A list of current and past committee members (1990 onwards) is available here:

<http://www.ams.org/about-us/governance/committees/gibbs-past.html>

Past Lecturers

<http://www.ams.org/meetings/lectures/meet-gibbs-lect>