New Chapter of the Association for Women in Mathematics at UMass

During January 2016 students in the department started a chapter of the Association for Women in Mathematics. The purpose of the Association for Women in Mathematics (AWM) is to encourage women and girls to study and to have active careers in the mathematical sciences and to promote equal opportunity and the equal treatment of women and girls in the mathematical sciences. The AWM website is located here: https://sites.google.com/site/awmmath/home.

The chapter was launched by sophomore Shelby Cox, who is a double major in mathematics and linguistics, with Professor Eric Sommers serving as faculty advisor. The students worked quickly to draw-up chapter bylaws and elect officers. Twenty women, both undergraduate and graduate, attended the first meeting. At that meeting candidates for offices spoke eloquently about being women in the sciences at UMass Amherst and about their vision for building up a community to support each other and other women thinking of entering the math major and related STEM majors. Candidates had many exciting ideas for the chapter, including outreach to high-school and middle-school girls, a brown bag lunch series with faculty speakers, professional development activities, and homework help sessions for fellow students. The offices were highly contested, and the speeches were impressive. An electronic ballot was held, and the elected officers of the new chapter are Shelby Cox (President); Kayley Miskis, a junior (Vice President); Tori Day, a PhD student (Secretary); and Athena Higgins, a sophomore (Treasurer). Jennifer Li, a PhD student, will maintain the chapter webpage.

Women math majors in our department are 33% of all math majors. While this is well above the percentage of women majoring in engineering or computer science, it is considerably below the national average of 42% across all mathematics and statistics department. We hope that the new AWM chapter will be a positive force in drawing and retaining women to study the mathematical sciences at UMass.