

AWM Newsletter: Letter to the Editor

To the Editor:

This month I attended the Association for Women in Mathematics' presentation of the Schafer prizes, which are awarded to extremely talented undergraduate women for their research. These awards were presented at the end of AWM's panel discussion.

I am ashamed of how our community treated these young women who thought they were there to be congratulated and honored. Instead, almost everyone attending the panel discussion, including panelists, noisily left the room as the award presentation was beginning.

What message was sent to these young women by this rude and boorish behavior? Here was an opportunity to honor and encourage some of our own who have done well. Are AWM members not supportive of these exceptional young women entering this profession? This lack of respect and support of other women mathematicians exhibited by AWM members is what has caused many women, including myself, to terminate their AWM memberships.

What are the actual goals of AWM? I used to think one of the primary goals of the AWM was equality for women within the mathematics community. I no longer think this. Rather, I have become convinced that AWM's activities serve to cement women as second-class citizens within this community.

I exhort the AWM leadership to examine their attitudes and behavior. Our community, especially the professional organizations within it, must set ambitious goals and identify mechanisms to achieve these goals if we are to have a healthy, vibrant, and diverse community.

I am happy to serve on committees and panels to promote strong, forward-looking, inclusive agendas. However, I will not reactivate my AWM membership until I am convinced AWM is committed to effectively and vigorously promoting women as first-class citizens.

Sincerely,

Lynne H. Walling

Professor of Mathematics

University of Colorado, Boulder