

interviewers. The more inputs you gather, the better, so don't pass on opportunities to talk to—and read material available online from—those who are generous enough to share their experience. Be mindful, though, that each experience is unique. There are no golden rules, and emulating previous efforts does not guarantee the outcomes you expect. The process of matching employers and candidates depends on many conditions, which are seldom replicated. Ironically, after you successfully secure the position you were looking for, you will realize that you can hardly call yourself an expert on how to apply for jobs.

So the moral is to learn from the experiences of previous job seekers without attaching too much weight to the past. As a corollary, be mindful that it may take longer than you wish. One should gear up for the possibility of having to weather a long search before landing a desired position. In particular, consider applying for positions that would foster your professional growth while waiting for your dream job to materialize.

This brings me to an important lesson that I have learned, synthesized by the slogan: *It's never over!* I confess that I used to think that there is a designated path for success and if you don't get to stay on it, life only goes downward. Actually, this is far from the truth, and it is easy to meet many notable professionals with unconventional paths.

In fact, the tedious and stressful job search could become an opportunity for professional growth. During the process, one is naturally led to improve communication and writing skills to present ideas and accomplishments. And at the same time, while being on the lookout for jobs, one also becomes aware of interesting professional paths that would not otherwise have emerged.

So I encourage you to take up the job search as an opportunity for self-improvement and a transformative journey towards a new chapter of your life.



Nicola Tarasca

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## Getting Involved in Your MAA Section

*Pamela Richardson*

Participation in the activities of professional societies is part of being in academia. Membership in a professional organization provides you with resources for research and teaching, access to journals and other publications, exciting conferences to attend, and other perks. If you are reading this, you are probably already familiar with the benefits of membership in the American Mathematical Society (AMS). Have you also investigated what the Mathematical Association of America (MAA) has to offer? If not, you should. In particular, I encourage you to get more involved in your MAA Section.

To help foster community in the mathematical sciences, every MAA member is automatically affiliated with a Section, a subgroup of members who live in a particular region. There are currently twenty-nine Sections, and you can find yours by using the MAA's "Find My Section" tool (<https://www.maa.org/programs-and-communities/member-communities/maa-sections>). Many MAA Sections cover a relatively small geographic area, making it easy to connect with other faculty members near you. Let's discuss the benefits of MAA Sections, as well as how you can get more involved.

**MAA Sections provide opportunities for networking and professional development.** Going to a Section meeting is a good place to start. Each MAA Section holds at least one conference per year, and since there are so many Sections, these meetings are often relatively close to home (and are usually considerably less expensive than a national conference). Every Section meeting has its own unique program, but they usually include invited addresses, contributed papers on both research and teaching, activities for students, and social events. Going to faculty talks can inspire you to try a new technique in the classroom or introduce you to a new research area. Attending student presentations can give you good ideas for undergraduate research projects for your own students. The social events are valuable networking experiences, helping you get to know faculty members at other institutions. Most Sections also offer faculty development programs or workshops, such as Section NExT. Modeled after the national New Experiences in Teaching (NExT) program, Section NExT organizes events to help new faculty integrate into the academic profession (e.g., sessions on improving teaching and

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learning, remaining active in research, navigating campus cultures, etc.).

**Participation in your MAA Section may be valued by your institution.** The standards for tenure and promotion differ widely across institutions, but most faculty members are required to do some combination of scholarship, teaching, and service. If you have new research results you want to share, an MAA Section meeting is a convenient venue for presenting your work. Attending professional development activities shows your commitment to improving your teaching. You can also get involved in Section meetings by volunteering to moderate or organize an event, introducing a speaker, judging a competition, or being a local organizer for the conference. If you want to participate in the general affairs of the Section, you could serve on a Section committee or run for a Section office. Depending on your institution, Section participation might be considered as service to the mathematical community or even as “scholarly activity” (as it is at my institution). Of course, it is a good idea to talk to your department chair and other colleagues at your institution to be sure you understand how MAA involvement fits into the expectations for faculty at your institution. If you are thinking about taking on a larger task like running for an office or serving as a local organizer, it’s also wise to talk to members of your Section who have done the job in the past to get an accurate picture of the workload.

The mechanism by which you can volunteer to help with a meeting, serve on a committee, or run for office varies by Section. Some have a survey posted on the Section website where you can indicate your interest. Others publish a newsletter containing a call for nominations and volunteers. In all Sections, you can reach out to one of the Section officers to indicate your interest in participating; current officers should be listed on the Section website.

**MAA Sections provide valuable opportunities for your students.** The first mathematics conference that I attended was a meeting of the Ohio Section as an undergraduate. There, I gave my first research talk, participated in a problem-solving competition, and got a lot of advice on graduate school and careers. It was a very friendly introduction to the mathematical profession. MAA Section meetings actively include undergraduate and graduate students, with most offering sessions for student talks or posters. Other events of interest to students may include panel sessions on business, industry, and government careers; graduate school fairs; sessions on activities for math clubs; pizza parties; competitions; games; and art exhibits. Visit your Section’s meeting website to see what is available at your next meeting!

**Participation in your MAA Section can lead to other opportunities.** Becoming involved at the Section level may give you a voice in the larger mathematical community. As a relatively new faculty member in the Allegheny Mountain Section, I volunteered to be the “Puzzle Czar,” an appointed

officer who creates the Section’s annual problem-solving competition. I then transitioned to be the Coordinator of Student Programs, which led directly into my nomination for the MAA’s national Committee on Undergraduate Students. Since then, I have served on three different national MAA committees (and chaired two), and this work has been a truly valuable networking experience. Attending Section meetings can expose you to programs and funding sources offered by the MAA (e.g., PIC Math, Dolciani and Tensor grants, National Research Experiences for Undergraduates Program, and StatPREP). Giving a research talk in a faculty session could help you find collaborators in your geographic area. Winning an award from your MAA Section might inspire your nomination for a national award. The bottom line is that your MAA Section is a local resource for nearly all aspects of faculty life. I encourage you to get to know your Section and all that it has to offer!



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