

**REPORT OF THE 3RD ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE
MATHEMATICS EDUCATION GRADUATE STUDENTS ASSOCIATION (MEGA2011)**

FEBRUARY 5 - 6, 2011

**CO-HOSTED BY UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA & SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
CONVENED AT UBC & SPONSORED BY PIMS, UBC, & SFU**

The Mathematics Education Graduate Students Association (MEGA) 3rd annual conference, held the weekend of February 5 & 6, 2011 at the University of British Columbia, was a resounding success. A conference for and by students, MEGA locates doctoral graduate students at a hub of broadly conceived, open, networked connections: amongst scholars, from undergraduates to faculty; across multiple perspectives in thinking educational concerns in mathematics, broad to particular; and regionally dispersed across Canada and internationally.

This year's theme, "Networking experiences in mathematics education and (mathematics education) graduate research", did indeed thread interestingly through the various presentations, capturing the tone and essence of the proceedings. We were thrilled to receive and engage with guest speakers, Sen Campbell (SFU), Cynthia Nicol (UBC) with Jennifer Thom (UVic), recently retired David Pimm (UAlberta), and Egan Chernoff (USask) whose presentations (respectively) around radical embodiment and neurophenomenology; ecology, mind and consciousness; language, symbols, and meaning; and networking online and otherwise anchored our discussions and served as springboards for thinking differently and beyond ourselves. In addition, and joining our small band of seven student presenters from SFU and UBC, we welcomed contributors from Ottawa U, OISE, Queens, and as far away as Cinvestav, IPN, Mexico. Finally, and rounding out the synergistic group of 43 participants, the UBC Mathematics for Teaching [M4T] Masters cohort joined us, contributing their thoughts and observations—perspectives from the practicing field.

MEGA conferences are intended to build community and move thoughts both in terms of research and connections with people and ideas. Final comments in our closing discussions variably described the benefits of conference: "There was something in every presentation that I could connect to. It is so necessary to have this"; "The breadth and passion here was nice to see"; "An atmosphere of good humour and safety, with mathematics as embedded" characterized these two days; "The event was eye-opening in terms of helping me understand" the process of coming to one's dissertation; It allowed me "to see projects at all stages", "to learn what others are doing"; "It's very centering, especially useful when one finds oneself stalemated in one's research world".

In retrospect, we five mathematics education graduate students (Lissa D'Amour, Steven Kahn, & Alayne Armstrong of UBC and Armando Paulino Preciado Babb & Christian Berneche of SFU) of the organizing committee come away having benefited, in ways unforeseen, from the experience of organizing the event. The mere negotiation of such a challenge makes one stronger and ultimately less daunted at the prospect of facing like challenges in the future. As it turned out, the pooling of ideas and resources made a potentially intimidating task into one almost magically assembled. Apparently, "if you build it they will come". Who knew? Help seemed available everywhere, provided requests were judiciously distributed. But it would be a gross understatement to limit a statement of benefits to a sense of accomplishment.

More important, undertaking such a project brought us closer to each other and to the community of researchers in mathematics education in general. Owing to the small size, this sort of conference necessarily moves everyone through the same experience together. This logistic—combined with consistent quality of presentation across a theme that we organizers were able to set—afforded a collective growth opportunity in community with others sharing common but differently expressed interests. Out of variations on a theme dear to us, we emerge in a kaleidoscope of opportunity where before only a shadow of possibility seemed to exist.

Finally and pivotal to our success—indeed without whom the conference would not have been possible—we point to our sponsors. Their generous support made the events broadly accessible: Contributions from the UBC Faculty of Education, the Pacific Institute for the Mathematical Sciences [PIMS], and SFU's Faculty of Education, Graduate Student Society, and Education Graduate Student Association supplemented a mere \$10 registration fee to provide for meals throughout the conference and covering, where needed (as in the case of 4 participants), accommodations for those travelling from afar.

Recognizing the unmatched value both to participants and organizers of graduate student conferences, these totally conceived and carried out by students, we both urge others to consider similar projects within their own communities and welcome inquiries about the process as it unfolded here in Vancouver. Finally, we look forward to future MEGA's as the tradition of student networking in mathematics education continues.

For more details please see <http://m1.cust.educ.ubc.ca/mega2011/index.html>

Lissa D'Amour (MEGA co-chair)
on behalf of the organizing committee