

IN MEMORIAM

HOWARD BENTON CURTIS JR.

Dr. Howard Benton Curtis Jr., Professor of Mathematics, was born July 14, 1924 in McKinney, Texas, and died December 4, 1972 in Austin, Texas at the age of 48. He is survived by his father, Howard B. Curtis, Sr. of Tyler and a sister, Mrs. John W. Rex, and two nephews David Curtis Rex and John Howard Rex, all of Oklahoma City.

He attended high school in Fort Smith, Arkansas, graduating in 1941. He received a B.S. from the University of Oklahoma in 1946, an M.A. from the University of Arkansas in 1948 and studied graduate mathematics with Gerald MacLane at Rice University and received a Ph.D. in 1958. He served with the United State Navy during World War II in the period 1943-1945.

Dr. Curtis taught at Texas A&M University as an Instructor, 1950-1954, and at Rice University as a Teaching Assistant 1954-1955, and as an Assistant in Mathematics, 1955-1958. After his graduation from Rice, he began his association with The University of Texas at Austin, first as an Assistant Professor 1958-1961, as an Associate Professor, 1961-1972, and finally as a Professor in 1972. He became a member of the Graduate Faculty in 1966. He was on leave during 1963-1964 at Rice University as a Visiting Associate Professor and Research Fellow.

One of the principal accomplishments of Howard Curtis was his developmental leadership of the graduate program in mathematics at The University of Texas. When he came into the Department of Mathematics in 1958, he entered a confused situation where a small faculty attempted to cope with a growing student body being drawn to mathematics in the push of the sputnik competition. Remnants of the old Pure Mathematics and Applied Mathematics departments coexisted in a newly formed department but could not cooperate in building a new unified program. Dr. Curtis, then a young Assistant Professor, organized and taught the first contemporary courses in analysis and general topology given in the department; the courses could not even be officially listed as such but were offered under catch-all conference course numbers.

As other new young faculty members came into the department in the early sixties, his example provided the stimulus for the creation of graduate courses in abstract algebra and functional analysis. His counsel and encouragement enabled other faculty members to withstand the frustrations and discouragement common to that period. When in the last half of the sixties, Dean John Silber allocated significant funds to build up the Mathematics Department, meaningful progress was made toward building a significant contemporary program in mathematics only because of the foundation to which he contributed so much.

During that decade of the sixties, in addition to his considerable role in restructuring the program of the Department of Mathematics, Professor Curtis was also very active in the supervision of graduate research. Seven persons completed their doctoral studies under his direction and thirteen completed M.A. theses; in addition he served as a committee member on supervising committees for twenty-nine other Ph.D. students and nineteen other M.A. students.

Not only did he pioneer in teaching contemporary courses in graduate mathematics at The University of Texas, but he also contributed much in developing its undergraduate courses. He began by modifying the undergraduate complex variables course (which was a special love of his), then he introduced an introductory analysis-topology of metric spaces course; and finally an honors calculus-advanced calculus sequence.

Dr. Curtis was an outstanding teacher to many students --those who responded to challenge of rigorous work he laid out for them. He was a gifted lecturer and presented well organized courses, but his teaching extended well beyond the classroom setting. One of the tasks he received least credit for, but which gave him great delight, was that of working with students in conference courses --in spite of the additional labor it imposed on him. He worked with more than fifty such students including several special students from Austin high schools who needed the challenge of mathematics courses beyond those then offered in high school. Several of these have gone to become professional mathematicians after having their lives touched and their interests quickened by the patience, understanding, and talent of Howard Curtis. The first Ph.D. awarded to a black

person at Rice University was earned by a man who received much of his early training in these tutorial courses.

Professor Curtis served the Department in many other ways than as one of its better teachers. He served as assistant to the graduate advisor and then as graduate advisor from 1959-1966 arranging programs for over two hundred graduate students per semester. He served as Chairman of the Colloquium Committee (1965-1966), Chairman of the Personnel Committee (1966-1967), member of the Chairman Selection Committee (1966-1967), and Chairman of the Graduate Studies Committee (1969-1970). In January 1970, he became the Vice Chairman for Graduate Affairs of the Department of Mathematics. In this capacity he was responsible for the scheduling of courses, faculty teaching assignments, supervision of Teaching Assistants, and numerous other administrative duties. He served conscientiously and distinctively in this capacity until his unexpected and untimely death.

Professor Curtis' professional activities were scholarly, building jointly on his interest in research and teaching. During his years at The University of Texas he delivered speeches and papers at annual meetings of the Texas Section of the Mathematical Association of America, The Texas Academy of Science, and at Conferences for the Advancement of Science and Mathematics Teaching. In 1966 he delivered an invited address on his research at Texas Technological University. He was a long-time member of both the American Mathematical Society and the Mathematical Association of America. From 1965 to 1968 he was a member of the Committee on Postdoctoral Fellowships of the National Academy of Sciences -National Research Council.

Professor Curtis was the type of person whose value should not be judged on the basis of his small list of research publications. He was a continually active scholar whose work saw fruition in the work of his students. At the time of his death he was preparing another research paper and two books. The books were to have been an attempt to bring to a larger audience his style and philosophy of teaching calculus through some coordinated text material. Dr. Curtis devoted perhaps too much of his time to the pragmatical problems of curricular improvement,

program development, and departmental administration; but in doing so he provided things of immeasurable value to students and colleagues alike. Time will blur the knowledge of events of the sixties at The University of Texas, but those of us who experienced the time will not forget the friendship, counsel, courage and example of Howard Curtis.

Appendix

Ph.D. and M.A. students of Professor H. B. Curtis at The University of Texas:

Ph.D.		M.A.	
George S. Innis	1962	Charles A. Greathouse	1960
Paul J. Knopp	1962	Thomas A. Atchison	1960
Thomas A. Atchison	1963	Nolan L. O'Rear	1960
Joe E. Kirk	1967	Joe E. Cude	1962
James L. Meek	1967	Joe E. Kirk	1962
Herbert O. Muecke	1968	Robert Lee Davis	1962
Julianne Soucek	1968	Ronald V. McPherson	1963
		Paul E. Saylor	1963
		James L. Meek	1963
		Roy D. Alston	1964
		Julianne Soucek	1964
		Charles H. Farmer	1966
		Fred W. Dodd	1967

Bibliography

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Lorene Rogers, President of The
University of Texas at Austin

John R. Durbin, Secretary
The General Faculty

This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a Special Committee consisting of Don E. Edmondson (chairman), Roger C. Osborn, and Dale E. Walston.