

Resolution on the retirement of

George F. Leger

Adopted by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences

The members of the Department of Mathematics join the Faculty of Arts and Sciences in expressing and recording our admiration and warm appreciation for our retiring colleague, George F. Leger, the Robinson Professor of Mathematics.

During his 40 years of service, Prof. Leger has had a profound influence on the development of the Mathematics faculty, and through it on the achievement of that unique balance of teaching and scholarship which characterizes our institution today.

Born and raised in Pittsburgh, George Leger completed his BS in 1945 at the University of Pittsburgh and his graduate work (MS, 1948, PhD, 1951) at the University of Illinois. He began his professional career as supervisor of the Applied Mathematics section at Bell Aircraft, then held faculty positions at Syracuse University, the University of Pittsburgh, and Western Reserve University, as well as a Research Fellowship at Harvard University, before coming to Tufts in 1963. He was promoted to Professor in 1965 and named the Robinson Professor of Mathematics in 1974.

Leger's PhD thesis, under the direction of Gerhard Hochschild, was entitled "On the Cohomology of Lie Algebras"; the major results were obtained independently by Koszul. Most of Leger's 21 papers were published in highly prestigious mathematics journals, and study the structure of Lie algebras by means of operators called derivations and algebraic objects called cohomology groups. His results have, in particular, contributed in a significant way to our current understanding of Lie algebras. His work in this area is not yet finished: one paper appeared in the *Journal of Algebra* in 2000, and at least one more is in preparation. Two unusual items in his bibliography are a 1975 article (in French) in the *Comptes Rendus* of the Academy of Sciences, Paris and a 1985 paper with Andrew Plaut (in biochemical English) in the journal *Molecular Immunology*. Also of note is his long and productive collaboration on Lie theory with Eugene M. Luks, professor of computer science at the University of Oregon.

Prof. Leger has been a steadfast champion of our graduate programs in mathematics throughout their history: the Masters' program in mathematics was started in 1963, the year he came to Tufts, and the PhD program began five years later. His two PhD and three Masters' students include Paul Ezust, our department's second PhD, and now chair of the Department of Mathematics at Suffolk University, and Alva Couch, now our colleague in the Department of Computer Science.

The character of the Mathematics Department at Tufts in no small part reflects the influence of George Leger over the past four decades. His deep involvement in faculty hiring from the beginning focused on building an ever more visible presence in the mathematical research community without diminishing our strength as an undergraduate teaching institution. The department's traditional research strength in algebra has diversified considerably, within both pure and applied mathematics. As Department Chair from 1973 to 1982, Leger was instrumental in developing a computer science program within the department, a program which later became independent and evolved into the present Computer Science Department. He has always been a champion of diversity with respect to gender and ethnicity in our faculty hiring.

When George decided to step down as Department Chair, President Jean Mayer wrote

“You have done a splendid job in building a strong mathematics department...The University and I in particular are extraordinarily grateful to you for your dedication and your judgment.”

George has always been, and remains, an enthusiastic and extraordinarily generous colleague. He is very supportive of the work of all his younger colleagues (a relative term which encompasses every other member of the department), listening and commenting in helpful and encouraging ways. His enthusiasm for a broad range of mathematics is evident in his constant participation in seminars and his many reading projects with colleagues. A few years ago, a speaker in fluid dynamics exhibited a picture of flow patterns around an airfoil, in which George--whose specialty in Lie algebras is about as abstract and “pure” as it gets---noted a practical problem. He pointed out that, with a flow pattern like that in the picture, “the plane would crash.” Sure enough, the speaker had to correct the picture.

George’s enthusiasm is not limited to mathematics. Over the years, we have heard him practicing viola or oboe, and have been greeted by him in French, German and, most recently, Italian. Some of us have had the pleasure and privilege of seeing his collection of art in his home. Several others – some much younger than he – have played George in vigorous games of court tennis or squash. All of us have marveled at his youthful energy and his physical fitness. We have also admired the generous financial and moral support he has lent to organizations such as the American Mathematical Society, and to charities and causes too numerous to mention.

Like everyone else in the department, George has taught a wide variety of undergraduate and graduate courses. At the undergraduate level, he has been particularly partial to Math 5, our “brief” introductory calculus course, which is often taken by students who are intimidated by mathematics as they start the course. Many of them have commented that George made them comfortable and confident with the material. At the graduate level, George has frequently taught the introductory graduate algebra sequence, most recently last year.

On faculty committees, George has been concerned primarily with curriculum and library issues. He served as department liaison with the library, helping to build up the mathematics holdings there. He served on the Liberal Arts Curriculum Committee from 1972 to 1978 and again from 1984 to 1986, chairing the committee in 1975-76 and 1977-78; he also served on the distribution subcommittee from 1969 to 1974 and 1997-2000, chairing it in 1973-74, and in 1997-2000.

George’s former wife, Jeanne, died in 1990. Their son, Jean-Pierre Leger, graduated from the Tufts College of Engineering in 1979, with a degree in electrical engineering; he is currently Senior Software Engineer in Bio-informatics at the Whitehead Institute at MIT. George has three granddaughters: Christiane, Alexandra and Brittany.

It is customary to say that a retiring colleague will be missed. We in the department are very fond of George, but we expect that we will not miss him, simply because, knowing George, we fully expect to see him at seminars and in other ways actively involved in the department’s robust intellectual life, which is in large part his legacy. We do wish him the utmost enjoyment of his new role.

On behalf of the committee, I move that this resolution on the retirement of George Leger be spread on the permanent record of this faculty and that a copy of it be sent to George.