

Resolution on the Retirement of  
James W. Schlesinger

For adoption by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences  
May 17, 1999

The members of the Mathematics Department and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences express our warmest appreciation of **James W. Schlesinger** (known to his friends as “Bill”) who is retiring after 40 years of service to Tufts University and his community.

Born in Kansas, Bill came to the Boston area in 1949 to study at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. After an interruption for Army service from 1952 to 1954, he obtained his bachelor’s degree in mathematics in 1955, and his Ph.D. in 1964. His dissertation, written under the direction of Dan Kan, was published in the Transactions of the American Mathematical Society. He was also co-author, with five other MIT mathematicians who collectively called themselves the “Massachusetts Institute of Topology”. This 1966 paper has been very influential in simplicial homotopy theory.

Schlesinger first joined the Tufts faculty as an Instructor in 1960 (with a teaching load of 4 courses per semester). He became Assistant Professor in 1964 and Associate Professor in 1968. In 1969, he succeeded James Clarkson as department chair, a post he held until 1973. This was a period of change in the mathematics department: the teaching load was reduced to its present level of 2 courses per semester, and the scholarly activity already established in the department was augmented by a number of new appointments. Schlesinger initiated the department’s engagement with computational mathematics and computer science, which led to the establishment of a Computer Science department, a decade later. He was for many years our resident “computer guru”.

Bill has consistently championed course innovation in mathematics. A finite math course, which he started, was the precursor of the present Math 6. He was a prime mover behind the multipace calculus sequence, which was used successfully by the department for many years, as well as the differential equations course for math majors, Math 38X. Many of the numerous supplementary notes he wrote continue to be used in our basic courses.

Bill has been an active and visible citizen of the Tufts community. Faculty committees which he has chaired include the Scheduling and Registration Committee (which finalized the “block schedule”), the Committee on Committees, and the Distribution Committee, as well as ad hoc committees on administrative structure and student life.

He had served as vice chair of the Tenure and Promotion Committee, and has been on committees concerned with the World Civilization requirement and summer school. He was president of the Tufts AAUP chapter from 1978 to 1980, having previously chaired its Committee Z (on salaries) and subsequently chaired its ad hoc committee on part time faculty.

Bill's educational activities have not been limited to his faculty role at Tufts. As president of the New perspectives School, he was party to a labor case that was ultimately argued before the Supreme Court. From 1978 to 1980, he was co-president of the PTO and coach of the math team at the Runkle School.

This spring, Bill is also retiring from the Brookline School Committee, of which he has been a member since 1981, including service as vice chair twice (1985-7 and 1995-6) and chair once (1995-6). On March 28, 1999, an article in the Boston Globe recalled many of the controversies and problems the committee has addressed during Bill's tenure. These included the fiscal difficulties associated with Proposition 2 <sup>1/2</sup> and again in a budget crisis in 1992, as well as debates about European history courses in the high school and about condom distribution in the schools. The article quotes Bill's fellow committee members on both sides of these issues expressing their deep respect for his character and integrity.

Bill's political activity in Brookline went beyond the school committee. He was president of Brookline PAX from 1977 to 1979. He has been a member of the Democratic convention every year from 1982 to 1997. He has been a member of the Brookline Town Meeting since 1976, with two interruptions (1983-5 and 1987-91). He has served on numerous advisory committees, including the Moderator's Committee on Health Insurance for Domestic Partners of Town Employees in 1997-8.

Bill married Laura Bratko in 1952. They have raised four daughters: Sarah, Jessica, Judith and Rebekah, three of whom are social workers (in Arkansas, Arlington and Jamaica Plain, respectively). Bill and Laura are the grandparents of two boys and one girl.

We in the Mathematics Department know Bill as a friendly and supportive colleague whose voice of civic reason is often laced with a self-deprecating humor. Thankful of his many contributions to the department's present state, we warmly wish him the best in the coming years.